

# AVALON EUROPE RIVER CRUISE SEPT 2010 - TIM

I was lucky enough to be invited by Avalon Waterways, to participate in a river cruise onboard the Avalon Tapestry during September this year. After many years of selling river cruises I jumped at the chance as it was something that I have always wanted to do.

The long flight from Melbourne to Vienna, via Dubai, was made much easier by the great service and food from Emirates. This is the third time I have flown with Emirates and so far I cannot fault them, I highly recommend all my clients to use Emirates whenever the price and availability is comparable to other carriers.

After our arrival into Vienna we settled into the Intercontinental for 2 nights, used by Avalon and Globus for most of their tours/cruises. This was a perfect base to explore the picturesque city of Vienna, our Avalon cruise guide was on hand during our stay to take care of any touring we wished to do in and around Vienna. During our stay we were able to see some of Viennas sights such as Schonbrunn Palace, St Stephens Cathedral, Vienna Opera House, Hofburg Palace as well as marvelling at many of the amazing buildings with the distinctive baroque architecture. This was my first trip to Vienna and it definitely exceeded my expectations, a must for anyone travelling to Europe.



**A great way to explore Vienna. It cost me EUR15 for the day, well worth it...no hills!**



**The summer home of The Hapsburgs, Schonbrunn Palace. Located on the outskirts of Vienna**

After our 3 days in Vienna, we then boarded the Avalon Tapestry for our 4 night cruise down the Danube to Budapest. Along the way we experienced some untouched little villages such as Melk and Durnstein, as well as the capital of Slovakia, Bratislava.

This is my idea of a real holiday as you can do as much or as little as you like during your time onboard. Some people chose to pass most days sitting up on the sundeck marvelling at the scenery as we meandered down the Danube, whereas others took full advantage of the time we spent on land to soak in the cultures of the various ports of call.

We spent the first morning in Melk and toured the Melk Benedictine Abbey. This was built hundreds of years ago on a rocky outcrop high above the town of Melk, overlooking the Danube River. The baroque architecture and painted ceilings are a major highlight, as well as the library which houses somewhere around 100,000 books!



**The Avalon Tapestry cruising into Budapest**

After some night-time cruising we berthed into another Austrian gem, Durnstein. Durnstein was a real highlight, as always we berthed near the town centre and was able to explore the town by foot, before tackling a steep climb up the hill to the Durnstein Castle. This provided some amazing views over the Wachau region of Austria, a well known wine growing area.

After descending back down into Durnstein village we found a little winery and thought it would be rude not to sample some of the local wines and cheeses. A couple of hours passed very quickly, before we made our way back to our 'floating home' for yet another amazing meal. This is just a typical day river cruising in Europe!



**Looking up to the Durnstein Castle from the village of Durnstein**



**Enjoying the views from the castle, amazing!**

We then cruised onto Bratislava where we took part in a complimentary coach tour of the city and surrounds, before doing a walking tour of the old town. This was very interesting as Bratislava has a unique history, with many war time stories being told, as well as the journey from communist rule to the flourishing nation it is today. Bratislava was a real surprise packet, I even managed to find an ultra modern mall on the banks of the Danube, which was handy to pick up some gifts for my family back home. This type of shopping is pretty rare in these parts of Europe.

The last stop on our cruise was Budapest. We began our stay with a coach tour of both parts of the city, 'Buda' and 'Pest'. As always, some of the architecture had to be seen to be believed, with the Parliament on the banks of the Danube a standout. Budapest has fast become one of Europe's most popular destinations and it is easy to see why, it has so much to offer from the history, museums, architecture, markets, thermal spas and the city parks.

We disembarked the Avalon Tapestry and spent the last 2 nights at the Intercontinental Budapest, perfectly located near the Latin Quarter.



**Parliament House in the background**



**The Buda Castle District**

To anyone considering travelling to Europe, I would highly recommend including a river cruise in your itinerary. It is such a relaxing way to see some parts of Europe you would not normally see, some real hidden treasures. You only need to unpack once which is real bonus, considering most coach tours will spend only 1 or 2 nights in each destination and you are constantly checking in and out of hotels.

There has never been a better time to book your European trip, as the value of the Euro makes your money go further.

And don't forget that we currently have some fantastic [Europe Earlybird deals on offer for travel in 2011](#), you can save by booking early and take advantage of other offers such as fly free!



**The sun deck on Avalon Tapestry**



**Typical scenery cruising on the Danube**



**TIMS TIPS:**

\*Purchase a EUR Cash Passport card and lock in your exchange rate before departing. This is a convenient and secure way to access your spending money whilst overseas. See us for more info.

\*Don't fall for the misconception that Europe is expensive. Yes, some areas are, but I found the areas I went to were extremely good value....500ml beer in Bratislava for approx AUD\$1.50!

\*Don't try and do all of the optional excursions on your cruise. There is so much to see, but unfortunately you can't see it all, travel at your own pace and don't overdo it otherwise you will arrive home absolutely spent. Take a day here and there to just sit back, have a drink and soak in the scenery.

\*Take a good pair of walking shoes, as you will do a lot of walking, especially on rough surfaces such as cobblestone streets

\*Book your Europe River Cruise now for 2011, as the Earlybird 'Fly Free' offers will end very soon!

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