

2024 Prague to the Baltic

Prague to the Baltic via Dresden & Berlin with Dr T

A 12-day (12-night) taste of Central Europe starting with 3 nights in the beautiful city of Prague, moving by train (2.5 hours) for 2 nights in Dresden, then by coach up to Berlin for 3 nights, moving on to the Baltic coast for 3 nights. Tour ends Berlin (final night) - option of extra nights here. Private guide throughout.

Sunday 8th September DEPART US

Monday 9th September Meet in PRAGUE (3 nights)

Arrival day in Prague: check-in to our central hotel, and explore the medieval streets of Prague, capital of Czechia (formerly the Czech Republic). We'll meet up from 5.30 p.m. for a drink and an introduction from our Guide, Dr Andrew Thomson, before heading out for our evening meal together near the main square.

Tuesday 10th Prague walking tour: New Town, Old Town, Mala Strana district

Set off at 9.00 a.m. on a **walking/ tram / metro tour**, starting by tram to **Wenceslas Square**: the story of the 1968 Soviet invasion and the November 1989 uprising which brought down the Communist government in 10 days. After coffee, a 3-stop hop on the metro to the **Vlatava River**. Tour of the **Clementinum** complex, a Jesuit site which housed the library of Charles University, founded in 1348. Our 45-minute tour gets access to the Astronomical Tower with great rooftop views over the city (steep stairs) and the National Library; a taste of Prague's intellectual history (the astronomers Tycho Brahe and Kepler both worked in the city around 1600). Break for lunch in the wide choice of cafés nearby, then a walk over the famous **Charles Bridge** to the pretty **Mala Strana** district on the left bank of the Vlatava - parks, churches, small streets with colourful houses. A coffee/tea stop, then back to the hotel by tram. Group evening meal.

Wednesday 11th Prague Castle & Cathedral; Museum of Communism; Jewish cemetery

9.00 am departure by coach up the Hradcany hill to Prague Castle and Cathedral. Guided tour of the outside features - and the history of the region, **Bohemia** - before audio tour of the **Castle** interior, including the spectacular 15th-century **Vladislav Hall**, and the room from which two Catholic noblemen were thrown in 1618 - the 'defenestration of Prague', which ignited the terrible Thirty Years War. After coffee, time for the **Gothic Cathedral**, whose construction was started in the 1340s by a French architect. Coach back to the Old Town for you to pick up some lunch before visits to the **Museum of Communism** (an interesting modern look back to the communist years), and the amazing **Jewish Cemetery** (whose thousands of leaning headstones may have inspired the Berlin Holocaust Memorial), together with the adjacent Pinkas Synagogue and Holocaust Memorial. Group evening meal.

Thursday 12th Train to DRESDEN (2 nights); city walking tour.

9.30 a.m. gather with bags for 9.40 a.m. departure by coach to the train station. 10.28 a.m. train to Dresden, arriving there 12.50 p.m.: 2 hours 20 minutes ride. Check in to our hotel in central Dresden (walk or taxi transfers): 2-night stay. At 2.15 p.m. we'll head off on a **walking tour** to sample this city from former East Germany - a city that has risen from the ashes of the horrific Allied air bombardment of February 1945, and then post-1990 has seen a post-communist restoration of its spectacular Baroque heritage, from when it was the seat of the Kings of Saxony. We'll visit the huge Protestant **Frauenkirche**, destroyed in 1945, left as a ruin in communist years, then completely rebuilt between 1994 and 2005. We'll walk on the fine **Bruhl Terrace** overlooking the Elbe River, hear the history behind the **Zwinger Palace** (we'll take coffee here in its sumptuous grounds), the **Semper Opera**, and the **Royal Palace** - its

Green Vault of treasures is one of many sites you could visit on our free morning. Group evening meal.

Friday 13th **Dresden: free morning; German Army Museum of Military History p.m.**

Free morning to enjoy the city's museums, palaces, shops, and walks. 2.15 p.m. departure by coach to the **German Army Museum of Military History**. Established in the 1890s, the museum has been run at different times by the Nazis and the East German dictatorship, before being completely redone in 2011: the result is a modern, unflinching, and intriguing look at the German Army's legacy, and its postwar role. Group evening meal together.

Saturday 14th **To BERLIN via the Meissen porcelain factory (3 nights)**

8.50 a.m. gather with bags for 9.00 am departure by coach for a 45-minute drive to the nearby **Meissen porcelain** factory, where we have a tour, museum visit, and coffee stop. 2 hour 45 minute drive to Berlin, plus snack lunch pause en route. Enter Berlin in the previous Soviet sector, stopping at the huge **Soviet War Memorial** in Treptower Park - a brash, in-your-face celebration of the Soviet victory here in May 1945. Check-in to our central hotel (3 nights); group evening meal nearby.

Sunday 15th **Berlin 1945; & Berlin as a 21st-century cultural centre**

9.00 am departure: by coach to start a **walking tour** through the heart of the government quarter. We'll see the former Luftwaffe HQ, the site of the Gestapo offices, the route of the Berlin Wall in the **Potsdamer Platz** area, the site of Hitler's bunker, the **Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe**, the **Brandenburg Gate** and the **Reichstag** building (housing the Bundestag, the German Federal parliament): if we can, we will get entry to the roof of the Reichstag. After a break for a snack lunch, we will drive to what was the heart of medieval Berlin around the River Spree. We will see the Memorial to the Burning of the Books in May 1933, then cross onto **Museum Island** to look at the restored cultural heart of Berlin: a wealth of museums, of which we will visit the new **Humboldt Forum** - built inside a recreation of the old Royal Palace, this is a museum incorporating the non-European collections of the Berlin museums. Group evening meal.

Monday 16th **Berlin Cold War**

9.00 a.m. departure: drive to the **Berlin Wall Memorial** and the preserved cityscape around it. Then out into the suburbs to visit the **Stasi Museum**, telling the story of the East German internal security service, in its former HQ. Then to the **1936 Olympic Stadium area**: a view of the site from atop the Glockenturm (Clocktower), followed by a **group lunch** in the **International Club of Berlin** which meets in the former British Officers' Club near the Olympic Stadium. After lunch we will stop at the Commonwealth War Cemetery nearby, then make a stop in the commercial heart of former '**West Berlin**', the Kurfurstendamm. Coffee stop, and a visit of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, left as a ruin from the 1943 bombing. *On your own for a meal this evening.*

Tuesday 17th **To the Baltic - introduction to island of Usedom (3 nights Zinnowitz)**

8.50 a.m. gather with bags for 9.00 a.m. departure for a taste of the Baltic Sea. 2.5 hour drive (plus a coffee break) to the port town of **Wolgast** on the Peene River, where we have free time for lunch before crossing over onto the **island of Usedom** - which includes fine Baltic resort towns from the late 19th-century, and also the Nazi's rocket **R&D facility at Peenemünde**, headed by Wernher von Braun. Introductory tour of the overall Peenemunde complex, including the remains of the liquid oxygen plant, the sites hit by a major British bombing raid in 1943, and traces of the R&D and housing sections (both officers' housing and the prisoners' camp). Coffee pause by the Baltic at Karlshagen to breath in the sea air, walk on the fine sandy beach, and see the region's famous wicker beach chairs. Check-in to our hotel in **Zinnowitz** (3 nights here), a charming German Baltic resort town from when tourism boomed with the railroad in the late 19th-century. Group meal in the hotel restaurant.

Wednesday 18th Peenemünde & the V2; afternoon free

9.00 a.m. departure for 20-minute drive to Peenemünde West to meet our guide, Herr Saathoff, who will take you in two groups in minibuses into the protected parts of the Peenemünde site, not normally open to the general public: the tour should take in the site of the first V1 (cruise missile) launches and Test Stand VII, the **V2 launch site**. Then transfer to the thoughtful **Peenemünde Museum** in the old power station buildings. **Group lunch** in nearby Karlshagen before coach back to Zinnowitz for a free afternoon. *On your own for a meal this evening.*

Thursday 19th Rügen & Stralsund

8.30 a.m. departure for a 2 hour drive to the beautiful (large) island of **Rügen**, one of the highlights of the German Baltic coast, with fine white cliffs, pine forests and extensive beaches. Our first stop is the **Königsstuhl National Park Centre** - this has a spectacular new **Skywalk** taking you over the 390-foot high Königsstuhl (King's Chair) chalk cliffs and woodland. After time for lunch here we drive 25 minutes along the coast for a tour of the **Prora** site, a Nazi family vacation centre built to deliver the regime's *Strength Through Joy* program of vacations for all - a first in Germany. The conflicting legacy of the site is sensitively explored in the attached museum. In the afternoon we will break our return journey in the pretty fishing port of **Stralsund**, which used to be Angela Merkel's parliamentary constituency. Walk & a coffee/ice cream break. Group meal in Zinnowitz this evening.

Friday 20th Back to Berlin, via Potsdam (1 night)

8.20 a.m. gather with bags for 8.30 a.m. departure. 3 hour 30 minute drive to **Potsdam**, plus coffee stop. Free time for lunch in the pretty **Dutch Quarter** of Potsdam before an audio-guide visit to the **Cecilienhof Palace**, site of the July 1945 Potsdam Conference. Drive across town for a walk in the grounds of Frederick the Great's 18th-century palaces, including **Sansoucci Palace**. One hour drive into Berlin for our final night. Group meal together.

Saturday 21st Departure day

Make your own departure plans - or stay

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