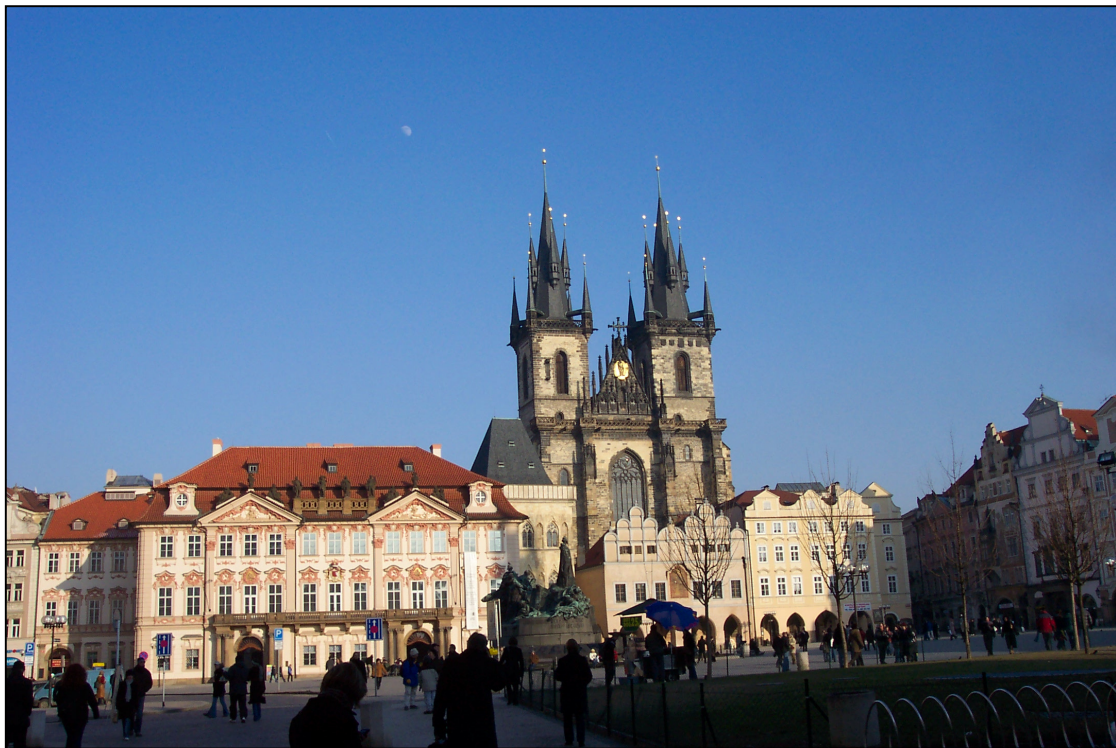


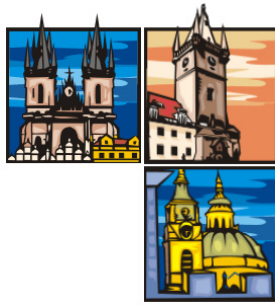


Expedition: Europe PRAGUE

07 Feb 03 - 16 Feb 03



RICHARD G RUSSO



Expedition: Europe

PRAHA

07 Feb 03 - 16 Feb 03

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IPRAHIA

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“Stověžatá Praha”

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9TH

Dobrý den, travelers!

Perhaps you know, although I assume you might have guessed; we are no longer in Firenze. In fact we are no longer anywhere on the Italian peninsula, which means without a doubt, our month-long journey backpacking across Europe is quickly coming to an end. It also means we find ourselves in the city of a hundred spires, Prague.

Vítám vás v Praze!
(Welcome to Prague!)

Truth be told we've been taking it easy since arriving in Prague – sorry, Praha, as they say in the Czech language; consequently, referred to as čeština (chesh-tyi-nah). We've been in country for three days thus far (this is our third day) and we're quite rested up.

Oh, but that by no means we've not been out and about. *Ne, ne, ne*. Our gracious hosts, Oliver and Vera Pansky (Cedric's father and step-mother) have taken it upon themselves to not only open up their home to us, but show off their beautiful city and teach us a little about their history.

Prague, they tell us, lies at the epicenter of what was once Bohemia, which borders Germany to the north and west, Austria to the south and Slovakia to the east; and since 1993 has been an independent nation. Prior to: the area was besieged by the Marcomanni (in 100 BC), the Huns (in 450 AD), the Avars (in 550 AD), the Moravians (in 624 AD) and the Magyars (in 896 AD). By the time of Charles IV (in 1346), Prague had entered at golden age as the reigning seat of the Holy Roman Empire (and thus Charles himself became the Holy Roman Emperor). Through the various wars that followed – the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire and following the Battle of Mohacs in 1526 – the Kingdom of Bohemia was integrated into the Habsburg monarchy as one of its three principal parts, alongside Austria and Hungary.

By 1918, following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire that concluded World War I, the Czechs joined again with the Slovaks to form the Republic of Czechoslovakia. A coup d'état in 1948 brought the independent republic under Communist rule, where it would remain as a member of the Eastern Bloc for more than 40 years.

In 1989, Czechoslovakia returned to a liberal democracy through the peaceful “Velvet Revolution” (a revolution by protest rather than by violence) and in 1993 the country peacefully split (a.k.a. the “Velvet Divorce”) into the independent states we see today: the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Neither country is a full member of the European Union at this time, although the Czech citizens are hopeful to be admitted next year. I couldn’t say about Slovakia but I should think not at this time.

Either way, as I said, we’ve not just been sitting here – although today is an exception. So please allow me to share with you what we’ve seen and done so far here in Praha.

Passports!

On the morning of Friday the 7th, we arrived at Wien Meidling quite bleary eyed and none too happy about the evening’s travels. Deprived of sleep we were having been startled away so many times during the night for passports. Imagine: being sound asleep then hearing someone bang quite loudly on your door, thrust a rifle in your face and bark harshly in a strange language for your papers? Hey, had I been James Bond attempting to smuggle out a Lektor perhaps I would have been more prepared to show papers upon request. I’m an American – we just don’t do that. So, yes, it was quite jarring to be aroused in the middle of the night, lights thrown in your face and scruffy men asking you to surrender your passport all without proper line of thought to grab onto. Grog.

Station	In	Out
Firenze SMN	--:--	20:53
Bologna Centrale	22:15	22:23
Ferrara	22:54	22:56
Rovigo	23:17	23:19
Padova	23:47	23:49
Ve. Mestre	00:11	00:36
Udine	01:54	01:57
Tarvisio Boscoverde	03:04	03:19
Villach Hbf	03:41	03:44
Klagenfurt Hbf	04:07	04:09
Leoben Hauptbahnhof	06:08	06:10
Bruck A. d.mur	06:22	06:25
Weiner Neustadt	07:51	07:55
Wien Meidling	08:55	--:--

Here, here you go!

I digress; we arrived in Vienna without incident but also without sufficient time to do anything while there. Originally, and before we even began the entire European endeavor, I had hoped we could spend a few hours in travel-through cities like Burn, Zurich, Venice and Vienna, alas most of those plans were overruled and day-time rail travel replaced by over-night couchettes. Be that as it may I still had hopes for Vienna – but we just didn’t get there with enough time. So, while I do have a stamp in my passport for Austria, the only part of it I really got to see is the inside of the train station. Although that is not entirely true. We did get to see some of the countryside in our ride out of Vienna – toward the border of Slovakia – but that’s not the same.

Slovakia: where we got yet another education in border patrol.

Since Slovakia is not a member of the European Union (or even prepping to become a member at this time) their borders are closed – passports are very much required, payment to traverse the rail lines there are demanded and their army – with even bigger

rifles than the Austrians – protect the borders with all seriousness. As soon as we hit the Slovak border the train came to a sudden stop, camouflaged men from the military boarded and they went through each car from top to bottom (or is that front to back?), checking once again on our “papers”. It was quite intimidating. Although I highly doubted they would shoot anyone – having not seen security of this nature in England, France and Italy (although I will now say I do remember soldiers at Roma Termini), to see it now is quite unnerving.

But there was nothing to worry about, of course. And I have a nice stamp from Slovakia to show off!

The same occurred when we crossed the border from Slovakia into the Czech Republic, although the Czech military were much more personable, even when we screwed up by not purchasing the proper ticket. Who knew the Eurail Pass didn’t work in the Czech Republic yet! In either case by mid-afternoon we arrived in Prague’s main rail terminal – the pronunciation of its name, Hlavni Nadrazi, escape me – and were met by Cedric’s dad, Oliver, who was as happy as a clam to see us.

After promptly collecting our bags, we exited the station and out into the coldest, wettest (read: miserable) weather we’ve been in yet. Holy crap was it cold! So cold, in fact, inches of ice – yes, ice! – had accumulated on the sidewalks, roadways and everything else it could; including the trees, buildings, and people! It’s freakishly cold here and all the three of us wanted to do at that moment was get some place warm. The only problem? Oliver has a freakishly small car so the only space available for us was in the back – luggage strewn across our laps – sitting on top of each other. Literally. But it was warm.

A twenty-minute ride, more or less, out of this part of the city, and we arrived at our home in Prague – Oliver’s place, a very, very, small apartment probably built by the Communists to house the population years ago. It’s very nice, the apartment, with all the amenities two people would need: a living room, a bedroom, a kitchen and a bathroom. The rooms are über small, however, and I wouldn’t fathom a guess as to the entire square footage of the place – two people can barely move around I couldn’t imagine how it’s going to be with the addition of the three of us!

But so far we’ve managed. Oliver and Vera retire to a cousin’s house for the night leaving the three of us to our own devices here. The couch pulls out into a sleeper (which comfortably sleeps two, but not three) with room to stretch out on the floor below.

In either case, after arriving at the apartment we were welcomed with wide open arms, fed this wonderfully warm (and tasty!) soup and looked over pictures of Cedric when he was a just a wee lad. Come evening, after resting up a bit, we hit the town with Oliver, catching a glimpse of some of Prague’s vast historical treasures: Old Town Square, the Astronomical Clock, Charles Bridge and the Palace (from afar).

Old Town Square

Warmly referred to as Staroměstské (Star-oh-myest-kah), Prague's Old Town Square is the country's heart and soul. Dating back to the late 12th century, the Old Town Square started life as the central marketplace for Prague and over the next few centuries, buildings of Romanesque, Baroque and Gothic styles were erected around the market, each with their own individual stories of intrigue. And with its ancient buildings, magnificent churches, and its famous Astronomical Clock, this is one of the most



beautiful historical sites in Europe. The Square is dominated by a monument to Jan Hus, one of the most important Czech reformers and nationalists I've come to understand. Besides becoming the first rector of Charles University, Hus simplified the Czech writing rules and wasn't afraid to firmly criticize the corrupt practices of the Catholic Church and Papacy. A practice he died for – Hus was declared a heretic and burned at the stake in 1415. His beliefs were

shared by the majority of the people, though, and the groundswell of support following his death eventually led to the Hussite wars. The statue was unveiled on July 6, 1915 – 500 years after Jan Hus' death.

We also found the gothic cathedral "Church of Our Lady before Týn" (Kostel Panny Marie před Týnem) and Kinsky Palace (both from the outside) to be equally pleasing to view in floodlight, though we did not explore them.

But it's the Astronomical Clock, or Prague Orloj, that I wish to speak about the most – what an interesting, but peculiar device, this was!

Found mounted on the southern wall of the Old Town City Hall, the Orloj dates back to 1410 under the creation of clockmaker Mikuláš of Kadaň and Jan Šindel, and consists of three main components: the astronomical dial, representing the position of the sun and moon in the sky as well as displaying various other astronomical details; the "Walk of the Apostles", a clockwork show of figures representing the Apostles of the church, on the hour; and a calendar dial, replete with medallions representing the months of the Gregorian calendar. It's more of a planetarium, than a clock, really, but it sure was both fascinating and beautiful to behold.



The dial itself could be looked upon as a form of mechanical astrolabe, a classical device used in medieval astronomy to, among its many uses, predict the positions of the Sun, the Moon, other known planets, and stars; to determine the local time (given the latitude) and vice-versa; for surveying and triangulation; and to cast horoscopes. You'll find a static representation of the Earth and Heavens, as seen from Prague; a Zodiacal ring, to indicate the location of the sun on the ecliptic; and two icons, a gold disk representing the Sun and the other, a half-silvered sphere, the Moon.



Our planet takes center-stage (as represented by a blue circle in the dial's middle) with the skies surrounding Earth. The phases of the day are marked in Latin above – *aurora* (“Dawn”), *ortus* (“Rising”), *occasus* (“Sunset”) and *crepusculum* (“Twilight”) – and the icons follow round as time progresses. During the daytime the sun icon sits over the blue/light part of the background, as one would expect, and at night it can be found over the black/dark. During dawn or dusk, the mechanical sun is positioned over the red parts in the background to denote the tenuous mixture of light and darkness. The twenty-four hour day is thus kept using the golden Roman numerals positioned at the outer edge of the blue circle, which indicate the count in Local Prague Time (or Central European Time) and the movement of the Moon on the ecliptic, also shown in a similar fashion, follows the lunar phases – although its course around the dial is much, much faster.

On the Zodiacal ring, you'll find the known signs of the Zodiac – in counter-clockwise order). The displacement of the zodiac circle results from the use of a stereographic projection of the ecliptic plane using the North Pole as the basis of the projection, which is commonly seen in astronomical clocks of the era. Other interesting things of note are 1) the vernal equinox (a.k.a. “Spring”) is denoted with a small golden star, 2) sidereal time (a time-keeping system used by astronomers to keep note of the direction to point their telescopes in to view a given star in the night sky) can be read on the clock using the Roman numerals, and 3) the reading of “Old Prague Time” – a unit of unequal hours (with the day from sunrise to sunset divided into 1/12th parts) – from the outer ring's script.

Last, but certainly not least, are four figures flanking the clock and the “Walk of the Apostles”. Set in motion at the hour, the first four represent the characteristics despised of at the time of the clock's construction. They are: Vanity, represented by a figure admiring himself in the mirror; Greed, represented by a stereotypical Jew holding a bag of gold;

Death, cast in skeleton form that strikes time upon the hour; and the Infidel, a Turk who wears a Turban. The presentation of the Apostolic statues also occurs in the doorways above the clock, with all twelve presented on the hour, every hour.

Needless-to-say, I found the Astronomical clock quite fascinating – I had to learn all about it!

We finished up at the Astronomical clock and attempted next to check out Havel's Market (Havelský trziste), which is located in the city's centre near Havelska street and off of Melantrichova street, a pedestrian route linking Wenceslas Square to Old Town Square, but unfortunately the market had closed for the evening. Although it runs year round, in all sorts of weather, it does operate on a time schedule: 0700 to 1830 and we were just too late to enjoy the fruits, vegetables, flowers, arts and crafts, leather goods, wooden toys, ceramics and, no doubt, tourist souvenirs the market had to offer. We had hoped to go back and take in this fantastic street market, alas, thus far, we have not – it's been too cold!

Did You Know?

Did you know it is said that egg yolks were mixed into the mortar to strengthen the construction of Charles Bridge? Unlike its predecessor, Charles Bridge has survived many floods, most recently in August 2002 when the country experienced the worst flood in the past 500 years – so the egg yolks must not have been such a bad idea!

From there we followed the “Silver Line” – or the “Royal Route” – through the Old Town and down to the Charles Bridge (Karlův most), a 14th century Gothic stone-bridge that spans the river Vltava (Moldau) linking the two sides of Prague together, that of Old Town with Lesser Town (Malá Strana) and Prague Castle. This marked pathway through town derives from the coronation processions of the Bohemian Kings, starting with George of Podebrady in 1458, who traversed the narrow streets down Karlova on their way across the bridge and their final destination: the castle.

Construction of the bridge was commissioned by Czech king and Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV, which then began in 1357 and finished in the beginning of the 15th century. In charge of its construction was architect Petr Parléř whose other works include the St. Vitus Cathedral over at the Prague Castle and most of the New Town area. Known at first as the Stone Bridge (*Kamenný most*) during the first several years of its existence (it only became known as the Charles Bridge in 1870), it is one of the many monuments that were built during Charles' reign; however, it is not the first bridge that ever connected the Prague banks of the Vltava. The Judith Bridge, which was the first stone bridge over the river, stood here in 1172 but collapsed in a flood in 1342.



The current bridge is 516 meters long and nearly 10 meters wide, resting on 16 arches shielded by ice guards. It is protected by three bridge towers, two of them (*Malostranská věž*) on the Malá Strana end and the third one on the Old Town side (*Staroměstská věž*). The bridge is decorated by a continuous alley of statues and statuary, most of them erected between 1683 and 1714.

The avenue of 30 mostly baroque sculptures situated on the balustrade forms a unique connection of artistic styles with the underlying gothic bridge depicting various saints and patron saints venerated at that time. The most prominent Bohemian sculptors of the time took part in its decorating, such as Matthias Braun, Jan Brokoff, and his sons Michael Joseph and Ferdinand Maximilian. Among the most notable sculptures, one can find the statuary of St. Luthgard, the Holy Crucifix and Calvary, and Saint Anthony of Padua.

The most popular statue is probably the one of St. John of Nepomuk, a Czech martyr saint who was executed during the reign of Wenceslas IV – he was thrown from the bridge. The statue's plaque has been polished to a shine by countless people touching it over the centuries. It's said touching the statue is supposed to bring good luck and ensure your return to Prague. Although bitter cold, we made sure to ensure our return by laying a hand on the statue's plaque. Well known also is the statue of the knight Bruncvík, although it was erected some 200 years later and does not really belong on the main avenue, or so I'm told. Beginning in 1965, most of the statues have been systematically replaced by replicas, and the originals have been exhibited in the Lapidarium, the National Museum, so most of the pieces you're looking at here are copies, but fine copies never-the-less. We didn't get a chance to examine all of them – it was dark after all – but we did get a chance to take a step (or two or three) across the bridge for good luck.



Our evening on the town came to a close at a nearby pub – yep, a pub – where we all sat down for a pint of the famous Czech “black beer”, a Bohemian brew as dark as Guinness but probably nowhere near as bitter. This, folks, was my first taste of beer and... it wasn't bad! I took to it like a kid in a candy store, downing the entire pint, in fact. Oh, not all at once to be sure, but I did at least finish mine – where as my travel-mates

did not. Oliver did, though, but that's to be expected – he lives here – but, needless-to-say, the dark lager's full bodied flavor with a little sweetness tucked inside sat well with me. Quite well, actually. So well, in fact, we went straight home after!

I was okay, truly, and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. It didn't affect me quite as much as I expected it to, but we were all getting a bit chilled, and tired, so we decided that after nursing the one pint we'd take off for warmer climes, and settle in for the night.

Vyšehrad



Come morning, Oliver and Vera would meet us again back at their place and, after another scrumptious home-made lunch, would take us on a sight-seeing trip to near-by park whereby, in 1085 – 70 years after the establishment of Prague Castle – Vratislav II, a prince of Bohemia's founding Premyslid dynasty, built a church and fortified trading post on a cliff top overlooking the Vltava River. It became known as Vyšehrad, or the “Castle on the Heights” and became

an important stronghold of Prague for at least forty years. Afterward it was mostly abandoned for Prague Castle but well maintained over the centuries.

The Vysehrad complex covers a large area, with several interesting parts to explore. Due to the extreme weather, many parts of the complex could not be comfortably visited or viewed (do you want to walk outside in the snow, ice and blustering wind? Didn't think so!); therefore, we accepted a brief tour around the grounds of the complex, featuring statues depicting figures of Czech mythology, the Rotunda of St. Martin (which dates from the 1th century and is one of the original rotundas of the city) and a magnificent vantage point overlooking the Vltava river valley. There we were treated to a fantastic view of the surrounding environs – covering in ice and snow – with chimney's blazing with smoke!





After snapping a few pictures of the valley, we made our way back to the car – it was just too cold to be out in the elements for too much longer. So, with our sightseeing done for the day (thanks, once again, to the weather), we made our way back to Oliver's place to get warmed up. While there we met one of Cedric's cousins – Peter – who hung out with us for the majority of the afternoon.

By evening, as our tummies began to grumble

and growl, we all bundled back up and headed out into the cold for dinner at Karavella, a restaurant two stories underground! Located at Michalská 15, Old Town, Karavella is quite a unique place – it's themed to the theme of an ancient merchant ship. The restaurant/bar comes complete with deck plating, port holes, fishing nets, life-buoys and a 5,000 liter under-floor aquarium as part of the décor and "salty sea dogs" as part its crew.

Yeah, a little overboard, but fun!

By evening's end Cedric went with Oliver and Vera to sleep at their cousins leaving Maya and I alone to our own devices.

Yes, we behaved.

And that brings us up to today, which so far has been filled with hot drinks and movies!

Currently we're watching a video showing footage of the great flood last year. Although interesting to watch for sure, many natives are unsure what's going to happen after the winter thaw. You see, many of the buildings were flooded and winter came, freezing everything, before the buildings had a chance to "dry out". This could spell disaster later but we're all hoping for the best.

We're going to lighten things up a bit with Crocodile Dundee (yes, in English) after.

Meanwhile I smell good things coming from the kitchen!

It's been a great couple of days in Prague, I must say, very relaxing.

Until next time!





“On the Royal Route”

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12+H

Dobrý den again travelers!

It's been a few days since I last shared our adventures here in Prague, and once again I must confess to doing more in the way of resting and little in the way of anything else. Not that we're complaining, mind you. It's actually quite refreshing to have little to do other than stay indoors, bundle up and keep warm.

After being on the go so often and for so long now, it's as if we're finally catching up on much desired rest. I know my feet are enjoying the time out. Even so – and as I said last time – that in no way means we've been lethargic. Of course not! Our gracious hosts, Oliver and Vera Pansky, have continued to take it upon themselves to keep their home open, arms wide and show off to us their beautiful city.

Including an interaction or two with their friends!

One afternoon we visited the homestead of one of Oliver and Vera's friends; Maya got an up-close, personal interaction with a wild deer there. And later on, we piled into Oliver's car and sped off to a nearby bowling alley to take part in a tradition that apparently went back quite a while: Czech Bowling Night. We refer to it as “Special Czech Bowling”; while the bowling alley was similar to those you'd find back in the States, the lanes presented to us weren't oiled (or at least not every well), you bowl with your normal tennis shoes on, you don't get to pick your own ball (you get these light-weight pink “pebbles” instead) and all the pins are on strings. Yeah, strings! So, as Maya so delicately put it (and I agree) “they look like little Muppets dancing around every time they get pulled up!”



On the first game I did quite well for myself, bowling a score of 99. Afterwards, though, my skills degraded further, bowling no more than 27 up through 3-rounds. By then our first full game had come to a close and we'd started a second. There I was poised to really mop up those Muppets – I was promising – when we ran out of time. Drat! After the game we sat with their friends, drank, and was merry! It was such a fun night out with the Czechs, though sometimes we just liked to party amongst ourselves.

Especially after picking up a bottle of Mead (that's honey-based wine and/or liquor) from a nearby grocery store and sipping it until we got silly, but thankfully not hung-over.

During the day, some of the time at least, we went out visiting the city's attractions, such as Prague Castle (and its immediate environs) and the Jewish Heritage Museum, amongst other, smaller, treasures. To that end, here's a little more about those...

Prague Castle & Environs



On the basis of archeological research and other written sources, it is believed that Prague Castle (Pražský hrad) was founded sometime during the ninth century (around 880 AD) by Prince Bořivoj, of the house of Premyslides (Přemyslovci). The early medieval site was fortified with a moat and a rampart of clay and stone, and grew significantly from there. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, Prague Castle is the largest coherent

castle complex in the world; measuring 570 meters in length by 130 meters in width, it covers a staggering 70,000 square-meters of land. Also a UNESCO World-Heritage site, it consists of a large-scale composition of palaces and ecclesiastical buildings of various architectural styles, from 10th century Romanesque to 14th century Gothic. The Castle has been rebuilt a number of times over the centuries, so it virtually represents every architectural style of the last millennium.

The grounds include the Gothic Saint Vitus Cathedral, whose interior is a fine example of Romanesque architecture; the Basilica of Saint George, a former Benedictine monastery which houses the world's largest collection of 14th century panel painting (as well as having the distinction of being the first convent in Bohemia founded); and several other palaces, such as: Starý královský palác (Old Royal Palace), Letohrádek královny Anny (Royal Summer Palace), Lobkovický palác (Lobkowitz Palace), and the Nový královský palác (New Royal Palace); gardens: Královská zahrada (Royal Garden), Zahrada Na terase Jízdárny (Riding School Terrace Garden), Zahrada Na Baště (The Garden on the Bastion), Jižní zahrady (South Gardens), Rajská zahrada (Paradise Garden), Zahrada Na Valech (Garden on the Ramparts), Hartigovská zahrada (The Hartig Garden), and Jelení příkop (Deer Moat); and defensive towers.



And that's where we headed the morning of Monday, the 10th. Due to the weather conditions the gardens weren't much to look at – snow and ice and all – but the rest of the grounds were very interesting indeed.

The main entrance to Prague Castle is from Hradcany Square (Hradčanské náměstí), the very heart of the castle complex. From here the palaces of Salmov, Schwarzenberg, Toskanský, Martinický, Sternberský, and Arcibiskupský are within easy reach, though not many are open to the public. Just who these men are were lost on me, unfortunately, so I am unable to part wisdom on their contribution to Bohemian and, therefore later, Czech history, but there is one part of the complex here in the square that caught my eye: Mariánský morový sloup, a stone column dedicated to the victims of the bubonic plague, which ravaged Prague from 1713-1714. The column, also known as the Marian Plague Column, was erected in 1724 on the very spot of a former altar where massive prayers were offered for the plague's dispersion.

Through gates decorated with garish statues of fighting giants and various vases (not to mention secured by the castle guard), is Courtyard I. Beyond this checkpoint is Matthias' Gate (Matyášova brána), a beautiful seventeenth-century triumphant antique arch turned memorial to Holy Roman Emperor and Czech King Matthias II. It's a can't-miss piece of architecture (you walk through it for goodness sakes) swallowed up by the castle itself. An inscription above alludes to its original purpose (it's a list of the emperor's titles); below rest symbols of lands and countries rules over in the Emperor's day. Pass through here (and by the guards) into the inner chamber- II Courtyard (Druhé nádvoří) – where you'll find a beautiful Baroque fountain and access to the Prague Castle Picture Gallery (Obrazárna Pražského hradu), located within the northern wing of the "New Palace", in the former stables. Here, paintings from Emperor Rudolph II's famous collection (he was known as a huge lover of art and made Prague the cultural center of Europe during his reign) are on display. Among more than one hundred unique paintings are also works of Titian (*The Toilet of a Young Lady*), Rubens (*The Assembly of the Olympic Gods*), Guido Reni (*The Centaur Nessus Abducting Deianeira*), and many others; works of art carefully selected from some 4,000 in the possession of Prague castle.



The palace itself consists of four wings – western, northern, central and southern – and is open to the public only twice a year, during two national holidays: "Day of Liberation from Fascism" held on May 8th (known to us as V-E Day, Victory in Europe day – the end of World War II in Europe in 1945), and on "The Foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic" on October 28, which marks the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918. Otherwise the palace is used for receptions of diplomats and statesmen officially invited

by the president; therefore, we did not see these rooms and halls except from a peek or two through the windows. Depending on which windows we peeked into, we saw Throne Hall in the southern wing (used primarily for state events), decorated richly with three crystal chandeliers, large Persian carpets and a painting of the coronation of King Ferdinand V; or Rudolf Gallery, a 47-meter long room decorated with reliefs from the second half of the 19th century; or Spanish Hall, a 43-meter by 21-meter by 12-meter space decorated with golden chandeliers, ornamented walls and large mirrors.

St. Vitus' Cathedral

Continuing around the outside of the large hall, as we did (peeking in when we could), we eventually came to Courtyard III and upon the imposing dark spires of St. Vitus, St Wenceslas and St Adalbert Cathedral (Katedrála Sv. Víta). The history of St. Vitus' is almost as long as that of Prague Castle itself. The first sanctuary here – also consecrated to St. Vitus – was an early Romanesque rotunda founded by Wencelaus I, Duke of Bohemia, in 925, and it actually became the third church on the grounds at the time.

The patron saint was chosen because Wenceslaus had acquired the arm of St. Vitus from Emperor Henry I as a holy relic. In the year 1060, as the bishopric of Prague was founded, prince Spytihněv II embarked on building a more spacious church, as it became clear the existing rotunda was too small to accommodate the faithful. A much larger and more representative Romanesque basilica was built in its spot. The southern apse of the rotunda was incorporated into the eastern transept of this new church as it housed the tomb of St. Wenceslaus, who had by then become the patron saint of the Czech princes. King Charles IV (remember him?) would lay the first stone for the third and final cathedral here – this one Gothic in design – in 1344 and the rest, as they say, is history. As such St. Vitus' is the largest and most important church in the Czech Republic. It's the seat of the Archbishop of Prague and the place where saints, kings, princes and emperors of Bohemia are interred. And apart from divine services, the coronations of the kings and queens of Bohemia were within, at least up through 1836.

Did You Know?

Do you know that although construction of St. Vitus' Cathedral began in 1344 it's been incomplete for most of its history? Initial construction was halted by the Hussite Wars and was not formally completed until 1929.



The western part of the cathedral, which is first glimpsed as you round the corner into this part of the Courtyard, is characterized by two tall towers and the relatively large Rose Window. Frantisek Kysela, the craftsman of the window, found his inspiration in the famous cathedrals of Paris (the resemblance to Notre Dame is unmistakable). Although this window is relatively new (it dates from the 1920s), its beauty is quite remarkable. And if you can get close enough with a zoom

lens, you'll discover scenes representing the biblical "creation" are depicted within the panels.

Below the window is a fantastic archway full of reliefs, representing the crucifixion of Christ and the heavens above. A set of double doors guard the entrance, also containing reliefs of a religious nature. On the South side you'll find the Bell Tower. Standing 97 meters high, this 14th century creation contains one of the biggest bells in all of Prague – Zikmund (Sigismund).

Weighing in at 18 tons, he was forged in 1549 by Tomas Jaros and later installed at the cathedral through a unique pulley system created by the daughter of the king herself.

And, according to some sources, the bell is surrounded by many interesting legends. One was that nobody knew how to lift such a heavy bell to the Bell Tower so the King's daughter created a rope out of princess hair and hauled the heavy bell to the top. She destroyed her invention, however, so that no one could duplicate her success. Another says when Emperor Charles IV died all the bells began to ring on their own volition. And yet another suggested, by a prophet, that the king would fall and die in front of the tower. King Wencelaus IV was so afraid then he wished it demolished. Although it ultimately survived, by the time they were done removing the first floor, news of the Hussite movement reached Prague. The King was so angry about the invasion he had a heart attack and died... in front of the tower. And finally, it is said that if the heart of the bell breaks something devastating will befall the entire country. That event occurred in 2002, just a few weeks before the catastrophic floods that hit the area. WICKED!



Just beyond the tower here is the Golden Portal, a tri-fold entrance archway, atop which is a 14th century Venetian art masterpiece. A rare glass mosaic polished with gold. The mosaic is made with about one million grits of glass in more than 30 shades of color. Depicting "The Last Judgment", you'll find Christ in the center surrounded by angels and Czechs kneeling below him. On the left is a depiction of resurrection. On the right, the banishment to hell; the archangel

Gabriel is shown driving the sinners to Hell. Charles IV is portrayed kneeling in the middle arch with his wife, Elisabeth of Pomerania, at his side.

And then there are the Flying Buttresses, magnificently thrusting skyward.

Impressive as it was, we decided not to take a peek inside the cathedral (an extra fee would have been necessary if we had done so), so unfortunately I cannot say too much about what relics may have resided inside. Though, considering the religious intent, and having seen many basilicas in Italy, I can offer up a fanciful guess.

Moving away from the cathedral, we washed upon the shores of the Old Royal Palace next, followed by St. George's Basilica and finally The Golden Lane.

Old Royal Palace, St. George's Basilica & the Golden Lane

Did You Know?

Did you know that during World War II, the Czech Crown jewels were hidden here at the Old Royal Palace? It was done so to protect them from air-raids.

Also located in the third courtyard is the splendid Old Royal Palace (Starý kralovský palác), the once honored seat of all Bohemian princes. Since being founded in the 9th century, this original structure has undergone a number of significant structural changes by the land's kings (Sobeslav I, Charles IV, Wenceslas IV and Vladislav Jagiello) to the miss-matched building we find today. For example: Sobeslav I built a

Romanesque palace here around 1135 (the remnants of which can be seen in the cellar); Vladislav Jagiello decided to build a huge hall on the top floor of the palace (Vladislav Hall), which required a marked number of modifications. Further changes came under what is noted as the Habsburg dynasty, which used the palace for coronations, assemblies, government offices and depositories.

Vladislav Hall used to be the largest secular hall of medieval Prague. From the 16th century on, it was used for coronation festivities, knights' tournaments, grand balls or markets with luxurious goods for sale. The hall is now used in the Czech Presidential elections and for state events requiring ceremonies. An interesting feature of this hall is Rider's Staircase. Knights on horseback could enter using this special staircase without having to dismount.

Next up was St. George's Basilica and Convent.

Founded about 920 by Prince Vratislav I, St. George's Basilica originated as the second church consecrated on the ground of Prague Castle. When the convent for Benedictine nuns was founded within in 973, the church here was enlarged and reconstructed; therefore, today only the foundations of the original building have been preserved.

The present Romanesque appearance of the structure – with main apse and two steeples – date from the time of the Reconstruction of 1142; a devastating fire consumed the castle that year. In the first half of the 13th century, a chapel consecrated to St. Ludmila was added as well as a portico on its western side. The early baroque period left its mark in the form of the present striking façade and with the reconstruction of the entire convent. By the early 18th century, the architect F. M. Kanka added the chapel of St. John Nepomuk. And after the devastating occupation of the convent by troops in the late 18th century, the church was renewed again from 1887 to 1908.

The interior of the basilica is Romanesque, austere and monumental: the tombs of princes from the Premyslid dynasty are situated in the main nave; the southern side of the chancel is adjoined by the aforementioned St. Ludmila's Chapel; and the convent has a simple and soberly decorated Early Baroque facade.



The Convent itself is one of the oldest in all of Bohemia; founded by Prince Boleslav II and his sister Mlada and given to the Benedictines. The story of its founding is told within: how when Boleslav II was 12 years old, he asked his sister to go to Rome and persuade the Pope to grant a bishopric in Bohemia. Mlada, a beautiful girl, went as asked with several proficient diplomats and returned with the required permission and the rest is history.

Later she became the first abbess of the convent, cultivating its noble privilege. Together with Prague's archbishop, the convent could crown Bohemian queens!

Although girls from noble families were sent to receive the country's education at its best, and the abbesses of the convent were members of royal families, it was abolished in 1782. The front section of the convent was converted into houses for priests; the back into barracks. Today the convent houses the National Gallery's collection of Bohemian Baroque art, which we didn't see.

Beyond the basilica is the Golden Lane, a high-point of our Prague Castle tour.

Dating from the 15th Century, this small street is lined by 11 historic houses, which currently exhibit medieval armory, textiles, and, of course, souvenirs. The lane was created when a new outer wall was added to the existing castle complex. Called Zlatnicka Ulicka (Goldsmith's Lane) at the time, due to the many goldsmiths's residing there; the residences lasted only a few years, and then were demolished. According to historical record, Emperor Rudolph II, in 1597, let twenty-four of the castle's fusiliers build their houses there, with craftsmen and other servants settling within later.



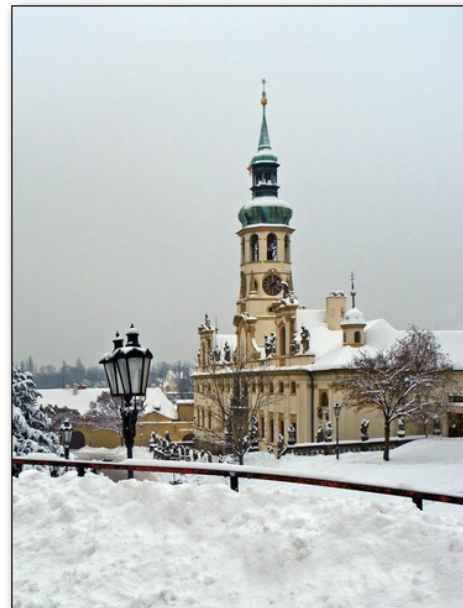
The street is actually one of the last reminders of the small-scale architecture surrounding Prague Castle and was inhabited up to World War II. From 1916 to 1917 house No. 22 was inhabited by famous Czech writer Franz Kafka. The appearance of a 16th-century dwelling is best demonstrated by house No. 20 with a framed upper floor.

The original size of one of these dwellings is best documented by house No. 13, which is the only dwelling here to have adhered to the original regulated building codes to which the room had to be built. Yep, it's built right into the arch of the wall!

House No. 14 also has some historical significance. It was the home of the fortune-teller Madame de Thebes who was killed by the Gestapo near the end of World War II, reportedly because she foretold Adolf Hitler's death and made her prediction known. The staircase in house No. 12 affords access to the terrace in front of the tower, Daliborka. This round cannon tower formed part of the fortification system and its bottom floor was used as a prison from the very beginning. The first and also the best-known prisoner was the knight Dalibor of Kozojedy, who was imprisoned here in 1498. Another well-known prisoner was Baron Frantisek Antonin Spork of East Bohemia, renowned in the 18th century as an admirer and patron of art.

Prazksa Loreta

Last, but certainly not least, prior to making our way back to Oliver's house to get in out of the cold (and to grab lunch), we visited Prazksa Loreta, another nearby church. The Loreta is a remarkable complex of buildings, consisting of a cloister, the Church of the Lord's Birth, a Holy Hut and a clock tower with a world famous chime. It also has the distinction of being an artistic and historical monument, as well as an important pilgrimage destination with ties to the *Santa Casa di Loreto* in Loreto, Italy. And that's not something you'd realize at first glance.



The *Santa Casa di Loreto* in Italy is a well-known Catholic place of pilgrimage since at least the 14th century. It is a plain stone building, 8.5 m (28 ft) by 3.8 m (12½ ft) and 4.1 m (13½ ft) high; it has a door on the north side and a window on the west; and a niche containing a small black image of the Virgin and Child, in Lebanon cedar, and richly adorned with jewels. But what makes the house a site of pilgrimage isn't its ornamentation, it's its relationship to the story of Jesus – The Santa Casa is *the* house.

According to the narratives, the house at Nazareth in which the Virgin Mary had been born and raised, had received the annunciation from the Archangel Gabriel that she would bear the child of Christ, and had lived during the childhood of Jesus following their return from Egypt, and lived after his ascension, was converted into a church by the apostles. Later, in 336 AD, the empress Helena made a pilgrimage to Nazareth and directed that a basilica be erected over the house. It was done and worship continued there until the fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Threatened then with destruction by the Turks, the house was said to be carried away by angels and deposited (in 1291) on a hill in Tersatto (now Trsat, a suburb of Rijeka, Croatia).

In 1294, the angels once again carried the house to safety, this time across the Adriatic, to the woods near Recanati, a town and commune in the Marche region of Italy. It is from these woods, the Laurentum, the chapel derives its name; however, it would not forever reside there. From Recanti the Santa Casa would be moved once more, in 1295, to its current resting place.

The site here in Prague is, of course, a copy in spirit, conceived as a self-contained complex of buildings around a central house, with an oblong, two-story arcade courtyard surrounding. Construction of the Prague Loreto began on June 3, 1626 at the order of Katerina of Lobkowitz, and gradually arose over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries. As it was during the times of Ferdinand II, its construction was part of the Catholic campaign to attract Czechs back to Catholicism, following Protestant defeat at what is known as the Battle of White Mountain.

We spent just enough time here to get a brief understanding of the church's history, and about its treasures: the treasury, which consists of a collection of valuable liturgical items – the most valuable and famous of these is the “Diamond Monstrance”, a golden chalice made between 1696-99 in the Viennese workshops of J. B. Khünischbauer and M. Stegner, decorated with no less than 6,222 diamonds; and the bell tower, which houses a carillon of not less than 30 bells cast in Amsterdam in 1691. Those bells have been playing every hour on the hour since August 15, 1695. That's quite impressive.



The Museum of Jewish Heritage

The following day Oliver and I ventured out together, leaving everyone else to keep bundled at home, to get a cup of coffee and see what other mischief we could get into. Turns out we decided returning home after finishing our cups of Joe was boring; rather, we decided to check out some nearby attractions instead!

It would be my first introduction to Prague's public transportation.

The Prague Metro comprises three lines, each of which is represented by its own color: Green (Linka A), Yellow (Linka B), Red (Linka C). There are a total of 57 stations (three of which are transfer stations) connected by nearly 60 kilometers of mostly underground railways. But due to the flooding last August, many of the metro's stations are down for major repairs, pretty much rendering most of the entire underground network out of service, so unfortunately we've not had an opportunity to ride it anywhere and the reasons why we've had to rely either on Oliver to drive us about or our own two feet (or is that six?) to take us where we wanted to go.

Be that as it may, the Metro is run by the Prague Public Transit Company Co. Inc. (in Czech officially Dopravní podnik hlavního města Prahy a.s.), which manages all means of public transport in and around the city – the metro, tramways, buses, and the funicular. Together they form a public transportation network reaching further from the city called Prague Integrated Transport (Pražská integrovaná doprava), which allows for ease of travel throughout this part of Bohemia. But whilst the metro system was down for the count, the tramway system was up, running and ready to take us wherever we wished. The streetcar system is the largest system of its nature in the Czech Republic, consisting of 140 kilometers of track, over 900 tram cars, and 33 lines of travel, providing a total route length of 540 kilometers. Believe it or not, the system began as a horse-powered convention in 1875, becoming electric beginning in 1891.

And Oliver and I availed ourselves of one to visit our points of interest.



We started our adventure by visiting the by the Dancing House (Tančící dům), the nick-name given to a rather non-traditionally designed and built structure in the center of downtown Prague. Originally named Fred and Ginger (after Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, of course) the house stands out amongst the Baroque, Gothic and Art Nouveau buildings for which Prague is famous. According to my Prague Tourist Book, the building was designed in 1992 by Croatian-Czech architect Vlado Milunić in co-operation with Canadian architect Frank Gehry, to be built on a vacant riverfront plot (where the previous building had been destroyed during the Bombing of Prague in 1945). It was completed in 1996 and instantly became controversial; it contrasted too much with the surrounding buildings.

Some have nicknamed it “Drunk House” because of their disdain. Even so, it was hoped the building would become a focal point for nouveau arts in the city, which it has done with marginal success. On the roof is a French restaurant with magnificent views of the city.

Secondly, we walked along the river front, catching fantastic views of Charles Bridge; returning to Old Town Square for a day-time look at the city’s famous astronomical clock; and down around Havel’s Market – there was far more activity there at this time of day!





And thirdly, the Museum of Jewish Heritage, which has a rich and unique history.



Believe it or not, the Jewish community here in Prague is one of Europe's oldest and most well-known. Established around the turn of the 16th century, Prague nobility allowed for an open atmosphere of economic activity; therefore, the Jewish people came and prospered. Although they were expelled during Habsburg's reign (twice, once in 1542 and again in 1561), they returned and became even more prosperous.

The reigns of Maximilian and Rudolf II from 1564-1612 are widely considered the "Golden Age" for Jews in Prague, living without fear of repression or expulsion. By the early 18th century, Jewish descendants accounted for about one fourth of Prague's total population. More Jewish people lived in Prague than anywhere else in the world!

By the start of the 20th century, however, the Jewish Quarter was in various states of disrepair and many questioned their existence. Thus, in order to start anew, a plan of “urban renewal” was put into action, demolishing much of the old Ghetto and everything in it. In order to preserve the valuable artifacts from synagogues falling during this time, Dr. Hugo Lieben and Dr. Augustin Stein, historians both, established the Museum of Jewish Heritage. Although their lofty goals were reached, preserving a number of artifacts from the Ghetto, the Nazi occupation of Bohemia and Moravia in 1939 put an end to their endeavor. But strangely enough, while other Jewish sites were being destroyed all across Europe, this one escaped relatively unscathed. In 1942, the Nazi regime established the Central Jewish Museum here, with the goal of “commemorating” the heritage of an exterminated people by collecting notable objects of Jewish origin from all the liquidated Jewish communities across Bohemia and Moravia; therefore, sparing this site from the atrocities of the holocaust.

Though the museum did reopen under the post-war communist government of Czechoslovakia, it only began to flourish again after the Velvet Revolution and Czech lands were liberated from the iron thumb of communism. As such the Jewish Museum has one of the most extensive collections of Judaic art in the world, containing some 40,000 exhibits and 100,000 books. In its entirety, the collection presents an integrated picture of the life and history of the Jews in Bohemia (and Moravia), providing quite a unique perspective of life in this part of Europe.

Visitors to the museum are presented with the following sights: The Maisel Synagogue, Pinkas Synagogue, Old Jewish Cemetery, Klausen Synagogue, the Ceremonial Hall, the Spanish Synagogue and the Educational and Cultural Center. Due to the floods, only a certain number of these buildings were open to visitors, so our tour was contained to the Educational Center, the Klausen Synagogue, the Old Jewish Cemetery and the Ceremonial Hall.

Old Jewish Cemetery

The Old Jewish Cemetery was established in the first half of the 15th century. Along with the Old-New Synagogue, it is one of the most important historic sites in Prague’s Jewish Town. The oldest tombstone, which marks the grave of the poet and scholar Avigdor Karo, dates from the year 1439. Burials took place in the cemetery until 1787. Today it contains some 12,000 tombstones, although the number of persons buried here is much greater. The cemetery was enlarged a number of times in the past. In spite of this the area did not suffice and earth was brought in to add further layers. It is assumed that the cemetery contains several burial layers placed on top of each other. The picturesque groups of tombstones from various periods emerged through the raising of older stones to the upper layers.



The most prominent person buried in the Old Jewish Cemetery is without a doubt the great religious scholar and teacher Judah Loew ben Bezalel, known as Rabbi Loew (d. 1609), who is associated with the legend of the Golem. Among the many other prominent persons buried in the Old Jewish Cemetery are: the Mayor of the Jewish Town Mordechai Maisel (d. 1601), the Renaissance scholar, historian, mathematician and astronomer David Gans (d. 1613), scholar and historian Joseph Solomon Delmedigo (d. 1655), and rabbi and collector of Hebrew manuscripts and printed books David Oppenheim (d. 1736).

The Klausen Synagogue

The Klausen Synagogue is located by the entrance to the Old Jewish Cemetery. It takes its name from the German word "Klaus" meaning "small building". "Klausen" (plural of "Klaus") was the name of the originally three smaller buildings, which Mordechai Maisel, Head of the Prague Jewish Community, had erected in honour of a visit from Emperor Maximilian II to the Prague ghetto in 1573. After the destruction of the original Klausen by the fire of 1689, work began on the present Klausen Synagogue, which was completed in 1694. The Klausen Synagogue held an important place in the history of Prague's Jewish Town, as it was the largest synagogue in the ghetto and the seat of Prague's Burial Society.

The permanent exhibition – *Jewish Customs and Traditions* – is housed in the main nave of the synagogue, and highlights the significance of the synagogue, the weekday services, the Sabbath and of specific Jewish festivals. The gallery contains exhibits associated with the everyday life of the Jewish family and customs connected with birth, circumcision, bar mitzvah, wedding, divorce and the Jewish household.

In the Nave, you are first acquainted with the basic characteristics and sources of Judaism, i.e. the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud. In the central space – the area of the original Bimah (platform) – is an unwrapped Torah scroll (the Five Books of Moses), the reading of which forms the most important part of synagogue liturgy. The scroll is accompanied by its usual appurtenances: pointer, mantle, binder, shield and finials. The Vitrines in the central section contain prayer books and ritual items used during weekdays and on the Sabbath (prayer shawl, phylacteries, head covers, candles, and spice boxes). A prominent feature of the east wall is the Baroque Holy Ark, in which wrapped scrolls of the Torah are kept. And special attention is placed on highlighting the symbolic relationship between the synagogue and the Temple of Jerusalem. The vitrines around the perimeter of the hall feature the High Festivals (New Year, Day of Atonement) and the Pilgrim Festivals (Pesah, Shavuot, Succot, Shemini Atzeret and Simhat Torah). The intimate space under the west gallery is dedicated to the most important fasts and religious ceremonies, Hanukkah and Purim. Particularly worthy of mention is the collection of Hanukkah candelabra and Esther scrolls.

The gallery houses the introductory section of the second part of the exhibition, entitled *The Course of Life*. This focuses, in particular, on circumcision and the redemption of the first-born. Exhibits that stand out include an illuminated manuscript of regulations and

blessings for circumcision from 1727 and decorated Torah binders donated in honor of a birth. Another milestone in life recalled here is the attainment of adulthood, during the celebration of which a boy is declared a bar mitzvah (son of commandment) and a girl becomes a bat mitzvah (daughter of commandment). Customs related to betrothal and wedding are covered by a number of exhibits, including illuminated wedding contracts and pewter plates serving as gifts for learned grooms. Divorce and the halitzah ceremony are illustrated by a bill of divorcement known as a “get”, as well as a ceremonial shoe. The west gallery focuses on the Jewish household with emphasis on typical ritual items – mezuzah and mizrah. Special vitrines are dedicated to kashrut and ritual slaughter and to the specialties of Pesah cuisine.

The Ceremonial Hall

On the ground and upper floors of the Hall houses the concluding section of the exhibition “The Course of Life”. The main theme is that of illness and death. Individual topics are accompanied by examples from the unique series of Prague Burial Society paintings from the 1880s. The main hall features descriptions and illustrations of assistance provided by the Society to the ill and the dying, ritual washing of the dead, and the burial ceremony. Exhibits worthy of particular note include a pitcher belonging to the Mikulov Burial Society, a number of illuminated manuscripts, and a collection of silver alms boxes. In the next room, focus is placed on Jewish cemeteries and tombstones - exhibits include fragments of tombstones from the 14th century and a wooden tomb structure from 1836. Another room is devoted to memorial prayers for the dead and engravings and paintings depicting the Old Jewish Cemetery of Prague. The upper-floor room focuses on burial society organization, domestic life and public representation. Noteworthy exhibits include portraits of representatives, a parchment document of the statutes from 1759, a ballot box and beakers used during the annual celebrations of the Burial Society.

All of it very heady stuff.

Although our stop-over here is winding down – this is our final day; tomorrow we’re off to Paris again – neither party appears sad. And why should we be? We’ve had such a great time here in Prague that it’s not only given us the much needed rest we required, but lifted our spirits greatly! It’s as if we could go on touring Europe for yet another month!

Tonight we’re going to celebrate by hitting the old town square just one last time; this time, however, we’re in search of a pizza place that Maya and Cedric ate at the last time they were here. I can think of no fitting conclusion to our time here in Prague than sharing a meal betwixt the three of us at a place that houses wonderful memories of time’s past.

Česká republika je překrásná země.
(the Czech Republic is a wonderful country!)



“Les Deux Magots”

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14TH – PART I

*Morning in Paris, the city awakes
To the bells of Notre Dame
The fisherman fishes, the bakerman bakes
To the bells of Notre Dame...*

How fortuitous is it that we three spent this day of all days alone in what has become known world-wide as the city of lovers? It's Valentine's Day, and as romantic as being in Paris on that auspicious day sounds, doing so without your loved one really isn't very fun at all.

Not that any of us can claim to have a loved one back home, or with us. But still!

In either case, it was quite the fantastic day here in Paris; a complete change from the weather we faced in Praha. There, where ice and snow clung to the ground, skies overcast and gloomy, and temperatures barely rose above freezing, were instantly replaced (well, sorta instantly – there was that stopover in Francfort, and it's pay-privy, but that's a story for a later time) with clear, blue skies, moderate (but cold) temperatures and absolutely no snow and ice. Traipsing around Paris today was simply a treat, especially with the warmth of the sun on our skin. We didn't need four layers of clothing today, nor did we want any!

Although at present the three of us find ourselves in the Parisian office of the Eurostar Chunnel railway, waiting for the train to arrive which will spirit us away back to London – our final two days in Europe – we spent the evening of the thirteenth in town (Thursday), and most of the day today (Friday). We will have some time in London tonight to toss the town, in the meantime... Paris. The majority of the interesting happenings occurred not after our arrival – how could they? We got in after dark, checked back into Caulaincourt Square, and then went out to the *Champs-Élysées* for dinner and shopping; what's exciting about that? No, the more fascinating activities occurred during the day today.

By and large, and for the most part, the three of us decided to go our separate ways in our explorations about the city today. Maya wished to spend time in silent meditation scaling the hills Montmartre to the *Basilique du Sacré-Cœur*, I wished to visit Notre Dame on the

eastern half of the *Île de la Cité* and the Panthéon, and Cedric, well, he wanted to find *Les Deux Magots* – a particular famous café, depicted on a 1930s portrait that he had acquired – but didn't have much of a plan after that. So while Maya went off to parts unknown, I helped Cedric find where on the Metro he had to traverse to possibly locate the Café (all we had to go on was the name of a church – St. Germain), so I found a spot on the map that matched the name given and away we went... together.

How long we would stay together was not yet known...

Cathédrale Notre Dame de Paris

Navigating the Paris Metro was second-hand to us now, and we found ourselves with luck in that the station we prepared to traverse to was only one transfer away. All we needed to do in order to get where we were going was simply take Line 12, our home line, two stops up to *Marcadet Poissonniers*, then take Line 4 in the direction of *Porte d'Orléans* – passing by *Gare du Nord*, *Châtelet*, *Cité*, and *Odéon*, in the process. Popping our heads back above ground at *Saint-Germain-des-Prés*, we were instantly introduced to the church.

A quick glance down the block afforded some interesting possibilities and a few moments later we were awarded our prize: there at 6 Place St Germain-des-Prés, 75006 stood *Les Deux Magots*.



The cafe, *Les Deux Magots*, so named after two wooden statues of Chinese commercial agents (maggots) that adorn one of the pillars inside, is one of the most famous cafes in Paris. The café was established in 1885 and quickly became a haunt for famous artists and writers, including Jean-Paul Sartre, Verlaine, Simone de Beauvoir, Rimbaud, Pablo Picasso, Albert Camus and Ernest Hemingway. Finding the cafe would not only be a historical stop on our Parisian trip, but also one of

context, as my friend wished to snap a photograph as a comparison. And though we grabbed the pictures we came to get without too much of a fuss, we couldn't quite turn away from it. As my eyes flashed across the room of small round tables and patrons sipping wine, café, cappuccino, and eating croissants, I asked – “want to get a cappuccino?” and before too long we were seated inside.

About an hour later we continued on our adventure, to the steps of Notre Dame Cathedral, on the *Île de la Cité*.

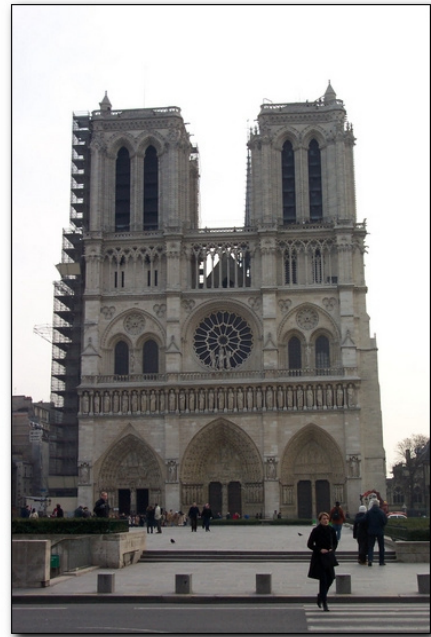
The History of Notre Dame

According to the brochure obtained on site, Paris, formerly known as Lutetium, was evangelised in the 3rd century. There were enough Christians by 250 A.D. for Pope Fabian to send the first bishop, Dyonisius, to Paris. He became Saint Denis, the patron saint of the city. At the time, Christians were persecuted all over Gaul and the Roman Empire. the bishop Denis had to practice the faith in secret, probably in a simple room in a Gallo-Roman villa. Denis was martyred a few years later with his helpers on Mont Mercure, later named Mont Martyrum, or Montmartre. His successors lived in hiding until the Emperor Constantine declared peace with the Church in 313.

It was then possible to build Christian edifices, and the first one was most likely built on the left bank of the island. What's not clear, however, was whether this church - known as Saint Stephen's cathedral - was a new construct (built in the 4th century and later renovated) or whether it took over a Pagan temple already on site (built then in the 7th century with old o reused elements). Either way St. Stephens was a large Christian basilica with five naves, resembling the ancient basilicas of Rome or Ravenna. Its western façade located about forty metres west of the current façade of Notre-Dame, was slightly less wide than the building's total length, approximately half the current width. Inside, the naves were separated by marble columns, and the walls were decorated with mosaics. According to the liturgy, it had a baptistery on its north side, named after Saint John the Round.

Saint Stephen's cathedral seems to have been regularly maintained and repaired, at least enough to resist damage from wars and the wear of time. However, by the mid-12th century, under the reign of Louis VII, the bishop Maurice de Sully and the chapter made an extremely important decision: they decided to build a new cathedral instead of rebuild Saint Stephen. Their plan would have this new cathedral be much longer and taller than the previous one, and be grander: the Basilica de Notre-Dame de Paris.

Tradition has it that Notre-Dame's first stone was laid in 1163 in the presence of Pope Alexander III, and construction continued in fits and starts since then. One of the things you'll notice is that the nave is clearly not properly aligned; the choir bends perceptively to the north. The reasons for these defects are reflected in the relatively long undertaking required to construct the cathedral. The transept and the choir were finished first, after which the nave and the double aisles were added. The western façade was completed last. And it's been continuously modified and restored ever since, depending on which way the societal winds blow.



And they blew a lot.

Visitor's introduction to Notre Dame comes not through its beautiful array of flying buttresses toward the rear of the structure, but through its imposing façade, said to be a "simple and harmonious mass whose strength and somber grandeur is based on interplay between vertical and horizontal lines." It's also one of the biggest treasures of the cathedral.

The Façade

Construction on the façade began under Bishop Eudes de Sully starting in 1200 and was continued by his successors for more than fifty years: the North Tower was completed in 1240 and the South tower was completed in 1250.

Although the dimensions are very impressive (41 meters wide, 43 meters high to the base of the towers, and 63 meters up to the very top of the towers), it's the facade's simplicity and harmony that has fascinated art historians and contemporary architects alike. Frenchmen Marcel Aubert wrote that it was "one of the Middle Ages' most famous, a masterpiece of composition and execution," and Le Corbusier would call it a "pure creation of the spirit." Le Corbusier believed the surface of the facade was governed by two simple shapes - the circle and the square - which could be used to explain the cathedral's geometric purity.



Symbolically, he reasoned, the square stood for the created, limited space (the church). The circle, then, stood for boundlessness, the perfect figure without a beginning or end (the image of God), and God's world breaking into the created world; God becoming man – the mystery of the Incarnation. If you look closely, near the gallery of the Virgin, a large rose window measuring 9.60 meters in diameter stands at the centre of the façade, forming a halo above the statue of the Virgin with Child between two angels. Mary's acceptance allowed God, as Jesus, to come into the mortal world, symbolized here.

Under the balustrade you'll find a wide horizontal frieze; this is the Gallery of Kings, a row of twenty-eight (28) statues representing the twenty-eight generations of kings of Judah, descendants of Jesse and human ancestors of Mary and Jesus. This part of the façade shows that Mary, though a mortal woman born of the human race, gave birth to Jesus who was both man and God.



The Portals of Notre Dame

Below the Gallery of Kings lay three large portals which are not exactly identical. The central portal, known as the Portal of the Last Judgment, is taller and wider than the others, the Portal of Saint Anne (to the right, or the south) and the Portal of the Virgin (to the left and the North).

The **Portal of the Virgin** was built in the 1210's – 1220's, after the Portal of Saint Anne, but slightly earlier than the Portal of the Last Judgment. According to Church tradition, it depicts the death of Mary, her ascension into Heaven and her coronation as Queen of the Heavens. Just above the two doors, on the lower lintel, there are three prophets on the left and three Old Testament kings on the right, holding phylacteries showing that God's promise has been fulfilled; Jesus has come to save humanity. Just above that, on the upper lintel, Mary lies on her death bed, surrounded by Jesus and the twelve Apostles. There are two angels at Mary's head and feet, lifting up her shroud and taking her to Heaven.

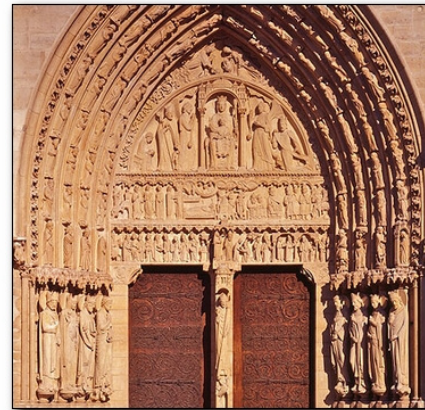


At the centre of the tympanum, Mary is in Heaven, seated on the same throne as Jesus. She is being crowned by an angel while Jesus blesses her and gives her her sceptre. She is made Queen of Heaven, Regina Cæli, in front of the Heavenly Court made up of angels, patriarchs, kings and prophets on the four successive archivolts. On the lower part, above the trumeau, there is a canopy that represents Heavenly Jerusalem, with a large trunk underneath it. It is the Ark of the Covenant, whose content once represented God's promise to His people. Mary is now considered to be the new Ark of the Covenant, because she brought the One who fulfilled God's promise to save humanity.



On each side of the two doors, there are nine full-size statues, featuring: on the left, the Emperor Constantine, an angel, Saint Denis holding his head, and another angel; on the trumeau stands the Virgin with Child; and on the right, Saint John the Baptist, Saint Stephen and Saint Genevieve (patron saints of Paris), and Pope Saint Sylvester. The abutments on the two doors depict the life of men, which follows an unchanging cycle. On the left and the right, the signs of the Zodiac which represent the twelve months of the year, and the labours of the months are depicted. The trumeau central features the seasons on the left and the ages of life on the right. These themes are also found on the West Rose Window.

The **Portal of Saint Anne**, installed before the other two (sometime around 1200), is unique amongst the trio as its tympanum reuses another made fifty years earlier from the former Saint Stephen's cathedral. In its center, there is a magnificent Romanesque Virgin with Child, with all of the elegant and serene characteristics of majestic Virgins. She is seated on a throne, under a canopy, bearing a crown and a scepter. Upon her lap is her Son, who holds the Book of the Law. The image has been translated to suggest Mary seems to say: "Enter into this church which is under my patronage. Go there to adore my Son, who came to this world to save all of humanity."



There is an angel on each side of the throne. On the left there is the bishop of Paris, on the right the king of France. Above the tympanum, in the concentric archivolt, we see the heavenly court (Angels, Kings, Prophets and Elders of the Apocalypse) singing the glory of God. Furthermore, the two lintels above the tympanum feature two friezes that tell the story of the marriage of Joachim and Anne and the marriage of Mary and Joseph; the upper lintel depicts scenes from Christ's arrival on Earth from the Annunciation to the Epiphany. Below the lintels, on each side of the two wooden doors, are nine full-size statues, featuring: a

king, the Queen of Sheba, King Solomon and Saint Peter (on the left); Saint Marcel, a 5th century Parisian bishop who vanquished a dragon symbolising the scourges his diocese was cursed with (on the trumeau); and Saint Paul, King David, Bathsheba and another king (and on the right).

The **Portal of the Last Judgment**, built in the 1220s-1230s, is the west façade's central (and lastly constructed) portal. It represents the Last Judgment as described in the Gospel of Saint Matthew. On the lower lintel, the dead are being resuscitated from their tombs. Just above that, on the upper lintel, the archangel Michael is weighing their souls according to the lives they led on earth and the love they showed to God and men. The chosen people are then led to the left towards Heaven (to Christ's right) and the condemned are lead to the right, to hell, by a devil.



On the tympanum, Christ is seated majestically on His throne of glory, reminding us that He came to earth to save humankind through his sacrifice on the Cross. He is showing the wounds on his hands and his side whilst the two angels next to him bear the instruments of the Passion: the angel on the left is holding the spear and the nails of the Cross, and the angel on the right is holding the Cross itself. Through this gesture, Jesus is asking us to trust Him and is showing us that everything is possible for us with His support and the help of all the saints who are working for us, especially Mary and John the Baptist, who are seen here as they were on the day of His crucifixion, with Mary at his right and John at his left.

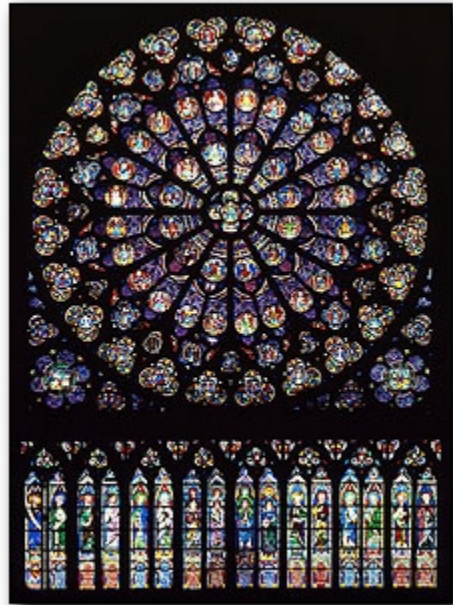


Above, like on the other portals, the archivolts feature the Heavenly Court (angels, patriarchs, prophets, Church doctors, martyrs and virgins), and hell takes up a very small space at the far right. We should not give up hope. We should keep our lamps burning, like the wise virgins depicted on the left abutment (on the Heaven side), while the opposite abutment shows the foolish virgins, who do not have any oil in their lamps when the Betrothed arrives.

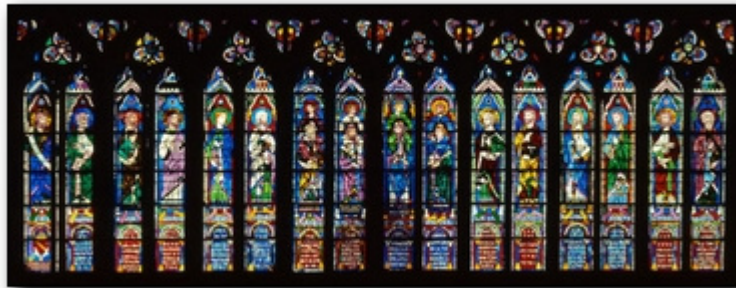
In the jamb, statues of the twelve apostles reside. These statues feature on the left, Bartholomew, Simon, James the Less, Andrew, John and Peter, and on the trumeau Christ is teaching, standing on a pedestal sculpted with the liberal arts, on the right, Paul, James, son of Zebedee, Thomas, Philip, Jude and Matthew. At the twelve apostles' feet, there are medallions representing the virtues and their corresponding vices.

The Southern Rose

Although we came to climb the towers of Notre Dame and see the bells that Quasimodo supposedly rung night after night after night, before doing so; however, we entered through the Portal of the Virgin, and took a brief tour of the Cathedral's interior. I can tell you from visiting a number of cathedrals on this trip (like St. Paul's in London or St. Peter's in Rome) the insides of Notre Dame weren't much different from those. The difference, really, comes in Notre Dame's sheer size (not to mention the beautiful façade). Though impressed with the historical, cultural and celestial artifacts and relics within, I was most taken by the Rose in the southern most part of the Cathedral.



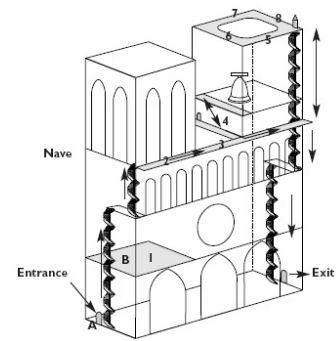
It is said the three rosettes Notre-Dame de Paris has are one of the greatest masterpieces of Christianity. And if that is so then the South Rose Window must be divine beyond all divinity, for it was a gift from the King Louis IX. Like its north sister, the South Rose Window reaches 12.90 meters in diameter, but if you include its bay, its total height reaches an impressive 19 meters.



Dedicated to the New Testament, the window has eighty-four panels divided into four circles. The first circle contains twelve medallions; the second twenty four. A third circle is made up of quadrilobes (four-leaf shaped), and the fourth circle has twenty-four trilobes (three-leaf shaped) medallions. Distributed between the two circles you'll find images of the twelve Apostles and throughout the four circles you'll find Saints and Martyrs traditionally honored in France, as well as the wise Virgins: Lawrence, a deacon holding the grill he was martyred with; Denis, the first bishop of Paris carrying his head; Pothin, the bishop of Lyon; Marguerite and a dragon; Blandine and two lions; George; Ambrose; and Eustacius.

In the fourth circle, there are around twenty angels carrying a candle, two crowns and a Censer (vessels made for burning incense), as well as scenes from the Old and New Testaments (in the third and fourth circles): the flight into Egypt, the healing of a paralytic, the Judgment of Solomon, the Annunciation and more. Also in the third circle and part of the fourth circle, there is a series of nine scenes from the life of Saint Matthew. At the edges, there are two corner pieces representing: the Descent into Hell to the east, surrounded by Moses and Aaron (at the top) and the temptation of Adam and Eve (at the bottom); the resurrection of Christ to the west, with Saints Peter and Paul (on top), and Saints Madeleine and John (at the top). The central medallion depicts Christ of the Apocalypse: the sword coming out of the Savior's mouth symbolizes His word separating error from truth. Stars are shining on the wounds on his hands, while temple lamps are lit around Him.

Under the rosette, the heavenly court is represented by the sixteen prophets. The architect drew inspiration from Chartres Cathedral, placing the four great prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel) carrying the four evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) on their shoulders, at the center. This window echoes the reflections of Bertrand, bishop of Chartres in the 13th century, on the connection between the Old and New Testaments: "We are all dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants. We see more than they do, not because our vision is clearer there or because we are taller, but because we are lifted up due to their giant scale." It really is a magnificent piece to behold in person.



Parapets of Stone

After admiring the windows and some of the other treasures within, it was time to make our climb. Three hundred and eighty seven steps are what it takes to reach the top of Notre Dame, and they don't come easy. Waiting for us at the top of the Cathedral, however, made the climb very much worth it: gargoyles, chimeras, the infamous bells and one hell of a view of Paris. It all lay... out there.

The walk up begins at the side entrance to the North tower.





Here it's just a few steps up to the Upper Room (1), which is at the same level as the organ gallery. The room has an eight section rib-vaulted ceiling whose keystone is 14 meters above the ground. Quite a few more steps up is The Chimera Gallery (2). This gallery, 46 meters above the ground, gets its name from the statues adorning the corners of the balustrade. These creatures, designed by Viollet-le-Duc in the 19th century, are fantastic birds, hybrid beasts and mythical monsters perching on the towers. The most famous of the chimeras, the stryga, on the right as you arrive, seems to gaze out over all of Paris. The sculpted decoration visible from the gallery is very rich, and includes

finials, gargoyles, grimacing heads and crockets. Further down the gallery you can over look the Place du Parvis (3), which bears the mark from which the distances between Paris and other towns are measured. The paving shows part of the outline of the previous cathedral and the line of what was once Rue Neuve-Notre-Dame, marked by large paving slabs. A vision you could only see from this height. Continuing along is The South Tower Belfry (4). Here you can see the Cathedral's largest bell – Emmanuel – cast in the 17th century. It weighs more than 13 tons and its clapper 500 kilos! The bell is only run on major Catholic feast days whereas the four other bells in the north tower peal out several times a day.

The Bells of Notre Dame

Name	Date	Tune	Weight
Angélique-Francoise	1856	C#	1915 kg
Antoinette-Charlotte	1856	D#	1335 kg
Hyacinthe-Jeanne	1856	F	925 kg
Denise-David	1856	F#	767 kg
Emmanuel	1681	F#	13 tonnes

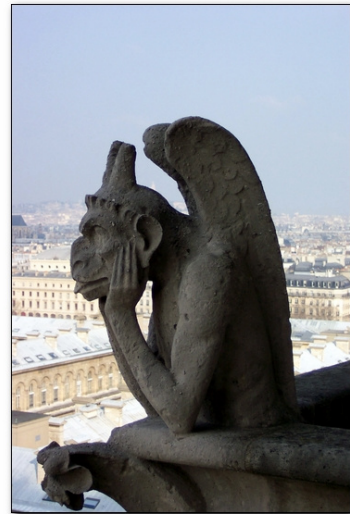
On the South Tower you can look out over the whole of Paris and enjoy a lovely view over the Seine and its bridges. To the west (5), on the Ile-de-la-Cité, you can see the Sainte-Chapelle, the Hôtel-Dieu, and the Palais de Justice, and further away, the Louvre and the Arch de Triomphe, echoed by the

Grande Arche de La Défense. To the north (6), the Saint-Jacques Tower and Sacré-Coeur rise up over Montmartre (hi Maya!). To the east (7), you can make out the Ile Saint-Louis and the Bibliothèque Nationale (France's national library). Here, if you look over the roof of the nave, you'll see the spire of the transept crossing. Four groups of three apostles, alongside allegorical depictions of the evangelists, descend on all sides of the spire. In the group of John the Evangelist, symbolized by an eagle, St. Thomas is portrayed with the features of Viollet-le-Duc and is facing the spire as if in admiration of his creation. And finally, looking south (8), on the left bank, you can see the maze of streets containing the oldest houses in the Latin District as well as the Church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre. On top of Sainte-Geneviève Mount stands the Pantheon, the towers of Saint-Sulpice Church and the gilded cupola of Les Invalides can be seen.

And after taking in as much of Paris as we could (and not running into Quasimodo), it was time to make the descent. I'm not sure what's worse... the walk up or the walk down!

Once we came down from Notre Dame, Cedric and I went our separate ways. He was interested in finding a place to lunch and I, well, I was fascinated by the Pantheon, which I had glimpsed from the top of the cathedral. I wanted to make sure I had a chance to see it before we made our way to *Gare de Nord* for our trip back to London. Saying our goodbyes, we departed.

(To Be Continued...)





“Le Pantheon”

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14TH – PART 2

To put my visit to the Pantheon into perspective, I must first talk about email. You see, months prior to this undertaking, I subscribed to France Monthly, an online French tourism newsletter whose mission is simply to highlight the French countryside and discuss points of interest along the way. One such email I received highlighted the Pantheon in Paris. Although I had no clue where it was when I climbed the steps of Notre Dame, spotting it from atop its parapets of stone enlightened me. I had to see it. So I walked across the nearest bridge and made my way over to it.

From the email, of course, I already had the Pantheon’s history...



Church or Pantheon? A Historical Perspective

In August 1744, Louis XV was in Metz with his armed forces committed to battle in Austria's war of succession, when he developed a high temperature. With his odds of survival so low, the King was read the last rites. In his prayers, the monarch promised to build a church dedicated to St. Geneviève, the Patron Saint of Paris, should be touched by God’s grace and survive. A few weeks later that miracle happened; the king rid himself of disease and made a full recovery. True to his word, the King entrusted Abel-François Poisson, marquis de Marigny with the fulfillment of his vow, but many years went by without a church being built.

Although the king really did intend to fulfill his promise, after so many years of war, first against Austria, and then against Prussia and England, the kingdoms' coffers were depleted and funds were unavailable to begin construction. This dire financial situation was aggravated by the fact that France had also lost its colonies in America and India. Living conditions in France were so bad that he couldn't possibly consider raising taxes. Enter Casanova; a man better known in the collective memory for his legendary exploits as a gifted charmer also had another noble trait: he was also a skilled financier. Casanova approached the king with a brilliant suggestion to replenish the country's coffers: a lottery. In the Age of Enlightenment that predated the wars, if you happened to be a thinking man and, more importantly, a wealthy one, you were also in the mood for fun, pleasure and money games. So, around 1760, when it became time to refill the kingdom's coffers emptied by years of wars, Casanova suggested to the king that he take advantage of the current passion for one game in particular, the lottery. Even though it had been around for years, the novelty of this new lottery and the brilliant idea behind it was to add a percentage to the price of each purchased ticket that would be transferred to the State. This met with Louis XV's approval, and the National Lottery was born. It encountered such success that it didn't take long to accumulate enough funds to build the church that had been promised for so long.

It took almost 15 years before Louis XV was finally able to honor St Genevieve. The king wanted a modern church built in the neoclassical architectural style so popular in the middle of the 18th century and largely inspired by a new desire to return to the glory of ancient times. He entrusted this mission to Jacques-Germain Soufflot, an architect who had studied antiquity and knew Italy very well. Soufflot drafted plans for a church that would be topped by a dome and would resemble a Greek temple with its particular columns and pediment. The interior floor plan was in the shape of a Greek cross with four arms equal in length and in width. The clergy, however, turned down any plans for a church that wouldn't follow the shape of a Latin cross. Soufflot had to revise his drawings, and decided to extend a span by about 65 ft in order to break this virtual cube that was most "uncatholic". Once he overcame this challenge, he then had to deal with the instability of the clayey soil on which the structure was to be built. Finally, on September 6, 1764, or six years after work began, Louis XV came to symbolically lay the first stone of the church. He was standing on foundations that had to be reinforced with thousands of wood pillars.



It was finally groundbreaking time but the project had many detractors who were constantly questioning the stability of the site. How much time would it take before the monument would sink below grade or the dome would collapse on the faithful? There were plenty of difficulties and plenty of critics, but work progressed nonetheless. In a sad twist of fate, Soufflot died on August 29, 1780. His assistant, Jean-Baptiste Rondelet, took his place and set about fulfilling his masters' vision. The work was finally completed ten years later.

The magnificent and majestic structure dwarfed the neighborhood, with its huge columns and its two front doors of almost 10 tons each, intended only to be open for grand ceremonies, as was customary in Ancient Greece. The interior also resembled a Greek temple with huge Corinthian columns and a gigantic dome that weighed about 11,000 tons. The bell tower, the crosses, and the 42 windows that let divine light penetrate the space were all reminders that it was indeed a church, only it had yet to be consecrated. However, it was 1790, and France was at the height of the Revolution. To consecrate a church at this time of deep turmoil and visceral anticlericalism was unthinkable!

The revolutionaries decided to make this Pantheon a place for the great men who had served the country, as opposed to a place for the gods. All the symbols alluding to the original religious vocation of the site were stripped, while 38 of the 42 windows were blocked, as light was not supposed to penetrate a place of reverence. The first man that the “Assemblée” (the lower house of the French parliament) thought of “pantheonizing” was Voltaire. After all, the poet and philosopher had denounced the injustices suffered by humanity and religious dogmas. However, there was a problem: Voltaire had never questioned the monarchy. So that idea was put on hold.

On April 2, 1791, Mirabeau died. Now there was a great revolutionary who could be brought into the Pantheon with great pomp. A few months later, a secret correspondence between Mirabeau and the king of France emerged. The body of the traitor was immediately removed from the Pantheon and thrown into a communal grave. Three months later, after many bitter talks and 13 years after his death, Voltaire became the second man to be “pantheonized”.



During the Revolution, seven people were “pantheonized”, five of whom came back out of the Pantheon almost as fast as they had entered the place. By the time calm returned, only two men still rested in peace in the Pantheon: Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, two prominent figures at complete opposite philosophical ends from the revolutionaries.

But its tumultuous history doesn't end there.

Napoleon, as an emperor, could not afford to get angry at the church. He set about returning the religious appearance to the upper part of the structure, while letting the crypt remain a burial place for the empire's leading dignitaries. A staircase was built to reach the crypt without passing through the area that was once again sacred. Louis XVIII didn't want to hear about any Pantheon, he wanted to give back the original religious character to the entire structure. But what to do with the 42 bodies then buried in the basement? How could one possibly imagine Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in a church? Wood boards were installed to hide the two anticlerical philosophers. When he was king, Charles X gave the monument back to the French people, and it was once again the Pantheon.

Then, on December 6, 1851, the future Napoleon III returned the building to the Church. It would remain a church up until the death of Victor Hugo in 1885, at which time it reverted back to being the Pantheon so that the writer could be “pantheonized”. As might be expected, some changes were made to the structure with each role reversal. Paintings were hung and sculptures added when it was the Pantheon, while sacred attributes were brought in or restored when it was a church.

Today, the Pantheon seems to have found its vocation for all eternity, and anyone can potentially enter the Pantheon as long as he or she is a French citizen and a few other formalities. Beyond its history and the 73 important figures who today rest in the crypt, the Pantheon is a grandiose monument in the tradition of Agrippa's Pantheon in Rome, and a magnificent specimen to explore.



Foucault's Pendulum



From the entrance to the nave onwards, the huge central space is emphasized by the rows of Corinthian-style columns along each side aisle. At the intersection of the four arms of the symmetrical ground plan, the transept crossing is delineated by thick pillars supporting the weight of the dome. Inside you'll find paintings depicting the childhood of St. Geneviève; of Charlemagne, initiator of the first parish schools, crowned in Rome in 800 AD; the miracles of St. Geneviève, which show the procession organized in 1496 to ward off the rains which were flooding the city, and the healings attributed to the saint's relics during an epidemic in 1130; the baptism of Clovis, King of France; of Joan of Arc and St. Louis (also a King of France); of Attila's march and St. Geneviève comforting Parisians; of St. Geneviève's death and burial of her remains alongside those of Clovis; and the life of Saint Denis, missionary to Gaul and first bishop of Paris.

And in the rear of the Pantheon you'll find a huge array by noted French sculptor François-Léon Sicard. Entitled *The National Convention*, the piece depicts Marianne (a national emblem, representing France as a State and its values: Liberty and Reason) surrounded by members of parliament and soldiers from Year II (September 22, 1793 – September 21, 1794) on the French Republican calendar, a very complicated calendar if I ever saw one.

Instituted during the French Revolution in order to sweep away various trappings of the *ancien régime*, the new Republican government sought to institute, among other reforms, a new social and legal system, a new system of weights and measures (which became the metric system), and a new calendar. Amid nostalgia for the ancient Roman Republic, the theories of the Enlightenment were at their peak, and the devisors of the new systems looked to nature for their inspiration. Natural constants, multiples of ten, and Latin derivations formed the fundamental blocks from which the new systems were built. From what I can gather, the first day of each year was that of the autumnal equinox. There were twelve months of thirty days each (given new names based on nature, principally having to do with the prevailing weather in and around Paris). The months were each divided into three ten-day weeks called *décades* (of these there were 36 in a year). The tenth day, *décadi*, replaced Sunday as the day of rest and festivity. Each day was divided into ten hours, each hour into 100 decimal minutes, and each decimal minute into 100 decimal seconds. Thus an hour was 144 conventional minutes (more than twice as long as a conventional hour), a minute was 86.4 conventional seconds (slightly longer than a conventional minute), and a second was 0.864 conventional seconds (slightly shorter than a conventional second). Instead of most days having an associated saint as in the Roman Catholic calendar of saints, each day has an animal (days ending in 5), a tool (days ending in 0) or else a plant or mineral (all other days).

And there's too many of those to mention, actually.

For twelve years this calendar was in use across France and I for one cannot see how anyone managed to use it effectively. Then again I'm sure the coming of the Julian calendar and later the Gregorian calendar caused mass confusion too, but still... these are massive time keeping changes all at once.



Although the sculptures, the paintings and monuments within the Pantheon were interesting in their own right, nothing drew my attention more so than Foucault's Pendulum. How could it not?

Situated right in the middle of the Pantheon complex, "hidden" under its massive dome, is the Pendulum. By all accounts a simple apparatus; however, it served one very big function: to show, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the Earth rotated. Although up until his experiment it was known throughout the scientific community that the Earth did indeed rotate upon its axis, what Léon Foucault did was demonstrate this physical property in quite a simple, and thereby reachable and understandable, way.

Mr. Foucault did more to add to the world's knowledge of scientific endeavors than just his pendulum experiment. He co-created the Fizeau-Foucault apparatus (an instrument involving light reflecting off of a rotating mirror toward a stationary mirror some 20 miles away), to measure the speed of light, which showed that light traveled more slowly through water than through air, blowing a hole in Newton's theory that light behaves as a particle (traveling in a straight line with a finite velocity). He discovered that the force required for the rotation of a copper disc becomes greater when it is made to rotate with its rim between the poles of a magnet, the disc at the same time becoming heated by the eddy current or "Foucault currents" induced in the metal. Foucault invented the polarizer which bears his name, and in the succeeding year devised a method of testing the mirror of a reflecting telescope to determine its shape. The so-called "Foucault knife-edge test" allows the worker to tell if the mirror is perfectly spherical or has non-spherical deviation in its figure. Prior to Foucault's publication of his findings, the testing of reflecting telescope mirrors was a "hit or miss" proposition.

But it's the Pendulum that most people know him by.

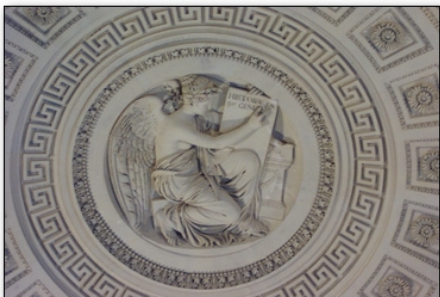
The experimental apparatus consists of a tall pendulum free to oscillate in any vertical plane. The direction along which the pendulum swings appears to rotate with time because of Earth's daily rotation. This is because the plane of the pendulum's swing, like a gyroscope, tends to keep a fixed direction in space, while the Earth rotates under it. The first public exhibition of a Foucault pendulum took place in February 1851 in the Meridian Room of the Paris Observatory. A few weeks later, Foucault made his most famous pendulum when he suspended a 28 kg bob with a 67 meter long wire from the dome here at the Panthéon. The plane of the pendulum's swing rotates clockwise 11° per hour, making a full circle in 32.7 hours. If you stand here long enough, you can see the movement.

Did You Know?

Did you know that Foucault is also responsible for naming the "Gyroscope?" Although the earliest known instrument of similar nature was made by a German, it was Foucault who coined its modern name, after the Greek: gyros skopein. (gyros: circle or rotation; skopein: to see the Earth's rotation).

The Crypt

AUX GRANDS HOMMES LA PATRIE RECONNAISSANTE
("To the great men, the grateful homeland").



This is the message that greets you at the entrance to the crypt; a cold, barren place at the end of a spiral staircase. Here is where you'll find dozens of tombs honoring those Frenchmen who have achieved the status of "National Hero" – regardless of their allegiances.

And it was the last place I visited before leaving the Pantheon this afternoon.

There are quite a number of souls at rest here in the catacombs, but only a few I recognized. They are:

- Voltaire – writer during the Enlightenment;
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau – writer during the Enlightenment whose political philosophy heavily influenced the French Revolution, as well as the American Revolution;
- Victor Hugo – poet, playwright, and novelist best known for authoring *Les Misérables* and *Notre-Dame de Paris* (the Hunchback of Notre Dame);
- Louis Braille – inventor of braille, the world-wide system used by the blind and visually impaired for reading and writing;
- Marie Curie – who created the theory of radioactivity (a term she also coined), techniques for isolating radioactive isotopes, and the discovery of two new elements: Polonium and Radium; and,
- Alexandre Dumas – a writer, best known for his works: *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers*.

Champ de Mars

With time running out on the afternoon's impromptu activities, I decided on one final stop of the day: Champ du Mars. Although we had been over to the Eiffel Tower at our first time through Paris, it had been a cloudy morning; therefore, my shots of the monument were relatively few. Those I did manage to get were shrouded, and uninteresting. I wanted to correct that. With the skies clear and blue and the sun shining brightly, I figured... why not?

From the Pantheon it was just a short walk over to *Cardinal Lemoine*, a station on Line 10, which would take me immediately over to *La Motte Piquet Grenelle*, right along the outskirts of *Champ du Mars*. One stop up on Line 8 to *Ecole Militaire* and I would be exactly where I wanted. Although it took some time to get there, I was not disappointed in the least!



Did You Know?

Did you know Champ de Mars is named after the Campus Martius in Rome? The field in Rome is a tribute to the Roman God of War. With the Military School nearby, the French also used this field for military exercises. Champ de Mars was the also the site of Expositions Universelles in 1867, 1878, 1889, and 1900.

With a few quick shots of the Eiffel Tower from afar, I had no choice but to turn and run back underground; I was due back at Caulaincourt post-haste. We were scheduled to leave Paris shortly! Getting back was easy enough: just a ride up Line 8 to station *Concord*, and a transfer there to Line 12. After meeting up with my travelmates, we grabbed our bags (which we left in the lobby of the hostel for the day), and made our way to the train station.

And with that, our return-trip to Paris came to an end.

* * *



We're just about an hour away from London now and though we're sad to be leaving Paris once again, we're excited to be returning to London. For some reason it feels like we're coming home. A strange feeling that but we've come a long way since we first stepped off the plane in London, and London is the last and final stop of our expedition.

So, we are coming home, and perhaps that realization is finally hitting us.

Alas, as soon as we get in we'll be making our way to the Rosedene (the same place we stayed while in town a month ago). And I have a feeling that Ebury's Pub is on our list tonight for tea and desserts!

Our last hurrah is upon us!



“Return to London Town”

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15+H

*Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do / Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too / Imagine all the people
Living life in peace*

Unfortunately, John... The world is not as one today.

It's been a right strange day here in London. Not quite the final day I had imagined it being, but interesting never the less.

It's not every day you're caught in the middle of a demonstration, right?

For the majority of the day, we've been embroiled in a country-wide – no, world-wide – march against the imminent invasion of Iraq by United States and other coalition forces. Why? Because, according to President Bush, the Iraqis are harboring weapons of mass destruction (a.k.a. nuclear, chemical, and/or biological weapons). Though I agree that should these weapons exist, the Iraqi's should not have them, I don't agree that invading the country is the right thing to do.

Either way, I won't be joining the rally.

But, due to the protesting in and around central London, getting to and from places was a total nightmare. A number of Tube stations were downright closed – including Green Park and Embankment/Charing Cross – which caused nothing but gridlock in the Underground.

LONDON, UK – Hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets of London to voice their opposition to military action against Iraq.

Police said it was the UK's biggest ever demonstration with at least 750,000 taking part, although organisers put the figure closer to two million.

There were also anti-war gatherings in Glasgow and Belfast - all part of a worldwide weekend of protest with hundreds of rallies and marches in up to 60 countries.

They came as UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, in a speech warning of “bloody consequences” if Iraq was not confronted, directly addressed those marching.

He did not “seek unpopularity as a badge of honour”, he said, “but sometimes it is the price of leadership and the cost of conviction”.

Shortly after he spoke, at around midday GMT, a tide of banner-waving protesters began surging through central London.

They cheered, shouted, sounded horns and banged drums, waving signs with slogans ‘No War On Iraq’ and ‘Make Tea, Not War’.

Contingents arrived in the capital from about 250 cities and towns across the UK.

The three-and-a-half mile march - organised by Stop the War Coalition, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the Muslim Association of Britain - was started early by police, over concern at the number of people gathering.

Two separate meeting points were used before the streams converged in Piccadilly Circus and made their way to Hyde Park for a rally.

Hell, the Victoria line wasn't even running in that direction and the Circle/District lines were so out of whack because they weren't stopping, chaos ensued. Delays were inevitable and the norm for the day, and all this chaos created one bollixed up travel plan.

I mean to say, who could move anywhere?

Needless-to-say the London Eye was out, as was Hyde Park and the London Zoo. I did take a chance and make it to the Covent Garden area of the city to visit the London Transport Museum and its environs.

Covent Garden, located on the eastern fringes of the West End, between St. Martin's Lane and Drury Lane (yes, the very same Drury lane where the Muffin Man, from the popular children's song, supposedly lives - do you know the Muffin man?). It is mainly associated with the former fruit and vegetable market located in the central square which is now a popular shopping site, and for the Royal Opera House. The district is divided by the main thoroughfare of Long Acre; north of which is mainly given over to independent shops centered on Neal's Yard and Seven Dials, while the south contains the central square with its street performers, and most of the elegant buildings, theatres and entertainment facilities, including the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, and the London Transport Museum.

Though mainly fields until the 16th century, it was briefly settled when it became the heart of the Anglo-Saxon trading town of Lundenwic. Returning to fields, part of the area was walled off for use as arable land and orchards by Westminster Abbey by 1200, and was referred to as "the garden of the Abbey and Convent". In 1540 Henry VIII took the land belonging to the Abbey, including what by then was called "the Covent Garden", and granted the land to the Earls of Bedford. The 4th Earl commissioned a man named Inigo Jones (now widely regarded as the first significant British architect of the modern age) to build something to attract wealthy tenants. Jones designed an Italianate arcaded square, something new to London, and as a result had a significant influence on modern town planning in the city.

The fruit and vegetable market began as a small open air market on the south side of the fashionable square around 1654. Gradually, both the market and the area became disreputable with taverns, theatres, coffee-houses and prostitutes; and the gentry began to move away, and rakes, wits and playwrights moved in. By the 18th century Covent Garden had become a well-known red-light district, attracting notable prostitutes such as Betty Careless and Jane Douglas; and Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies, a guidebook to the prostitutes and whorehouses, became a bestseller. An Act of Parliament was drawn up to control the area, and Charles Fowler's neo-classical building was erected to cover and help organize the market. The area declined as a pleasure-ground as the market grew and further buildings were added: the Floral Hall, Charter Market, and in 1904, the Jubilee Market. However, by the end of the 1960s, traffic congestion was causing major problems, and in 1974 the market relocated to the New Covent Garden Market about three miles (5 km) south-west at Nine Elms. The central building re-opened as a shopping arcade in 1980, and is now quite a popular location containing cafes, pubs, small shops, and a small craft markets.

As for the museum itself, I found it fascinating. The galleries show the development of London and its transport systems, along with giving an insight into the lives of past commuters and transport workers over the past 200 years. Lively exhibitions explore the powerful link between transport and the growth of modern London, its culture and society since 1800; full of light, color and movement, the Museum explores how transport has given the City its unique cultural identity. The collection contains a wealth of heritage vehicles, posters, artworks, photographs, film and video footage, engineering drawings, uniforms, station signs and tickets. Highlights include the iconic red London Routemaster bus, the world's first Underground steam train and the 'padded cell' – one of the first electric locomotive Underground trains dating back to 1890. The Design for travel gallery showcases pioneering advertising posters and artworks. The displays include Harry Beck's original artwork for his ground breaking London Underground map. It also explains the development of the internationally recognizable 'cross-bar and circle' roundel logo. Not to mention the "Love is..." posters!



The first parts of the collection were brought together at the beginning of the 20th century by the London General Omnibus Company (LGOC) when it began to preserve buses being retired from service. After the LGOC was taken over by the London Electric Railway (LER), the collection was expanded to include rail vehicles. It continued to expand after the LER became part of the London Passenger Transport Board in the 1930s and as the organization passed through various successor bodies up to TfL, London's current transport authority. As such the museum also looks at future transport projects and compares London's transport to five other major world cities: Delhi, New York, Paris, Shanghai, and Tokyo.

After a brief turn at the Transport Museum, I met Cedric and Maya down at Piccadilly to call upon an old friend, Delia Lees. You remember her, don't you; our waitress at the Hard Rock Café?

Well, she remembered us!

Though not by name, of course, but she remembered our order. Walking in and requesting a table in her section certainly threw her for a loop; the perplexed look on her face when she came over to us hid no emotion. When we asked her if she recognized the three of us she first said that she didn't, but then cocked her head slightly and looked over us. A smile pulled at the corner of her lips. "Why, yes! You're traveling here from America and were going to Paris and Florence and Prague as well. I remember, you had the soup, you the salad and you also had the soup." And that's exactly what we wanted again today and told her so, our amazement shining brightly. You see, although knowing the order of your customers is somewhat expected of your regulars, remembering our one order from two fortnights ago... well that's priceless.



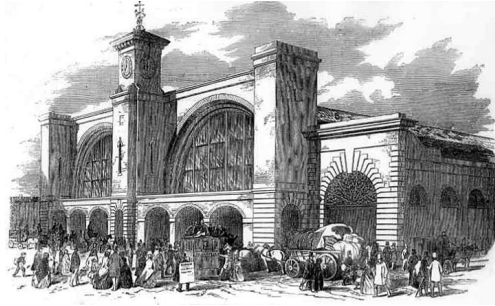
We reveled in our soup and in Delia's company. Sorry Jimmy, we didn't come for another visit, but, rock on man!

Harry Potter

the line for visiting was so long, I didn't have the heart to stick around. I did permit myself a couple of quotes from Sherlock Holmes before disappearing back underground. Though going all the way up there wasn't for naught. Since I was so close to Kings Cross / St. Pancrass, I thought... why not visit Platform 9 and $\frac{3}{4}$?

After lunch we broke up again and I made an honest attempt to visit Madame Tussauds Wax Museum on the corner of Allsop Place and Marylebone Road, just north of Central London, but it took so much time to get to Baker Street (the nearest Tube Station), and

King's Cross was originally designed and built as the London hub of the Great Northern Railway and terminus of the East Coast main line. It took its name from the Kings Cross area of London, itself named after a monument to King George IV that was demolished in 1845. Plans for the station were first made in December 1848 by and under the direction of George Turnbull, resident engineer for construction of the first 20 miles of the Great Northern Railway out of London. The detailed design was by Lewis Cubitt (the younger brother of Thomas Cubitt, the leading master builder in London in the second quarter of the 19th century), and construction was in 1851–1852 on the site of a former fever and smallpox hospital. The main part of the station, which today includes platforms 1 to 8, was opened on 14 October 1852.



Fans of the Harry Potter book series know that the ride on the Hogwarts Express starts from King's Cross railway station platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$, which is invisible to Muggle (a.k.a. non-magic folk) eyes and is reached by walking through the barrier between platforms 9 and 10.

Unfortunately there's a hitch in this story: there is no barrier between platforms 9 and 10 at the real King's Cross station.

Rowling, the series' author, discovered after the books were published that she had confused the layout of King's Cross with that of Euston station, and that platforms 9 and 10 at King's Cross were not the ones between which she had meant her magical platform to be placed. To solve this, the filmmakers re-numbered platforms 4 and 5 for the duration of filming. In reality, at both King's Cross and Euston, platforms 9 and 10 are separated by railway lines, but you can see the barrier between Platforms 4 and 5 at King's Cross. And that's what I wanted to see.



I wasn't disappointed. Sure enough there's a sign over a closed in archway that reads Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$!

With just a little more time left to spare before I met up with my travel-mates again for dinner (traveling across the city took a long, long time), I took another walk along the Thames at Hay's Wharf and bid goodbye to the Tower Bridge. Tracing my steps back along the Queen's Walk, I dove Underground at London Bridge and made way to Piccadilly Circus for our last meal together at Rainforest Café.

* * *

Tomorrow morning I leave my travel-mates, Cedric and Maya, still in their slumber. I'll be the first of us to go; they, however, get one more day in town. I can't say that I'm jealous of that, though. After spending a month traipsing around Europe I find that I'm ready to go home... if only for a short time.

At the beginning of this adventure, which started out as the culmination of one and the start of another, I said I wasn't doing this to become the ultimate fan of Cirque du Soleil, or prove that I was the ultimate fan (the whole reason I wanted to come to London in the first place was to see Cirque du Soleil's Saltimbanco). The Grand Tour, as its journey was called, was an amazing adventure that not only expanded my fandom of Cirque du Soleil, but also led to the extension of my knowledge of the world. This new journey – Expedition: Europe – is one that I sometimes do not have the appropriate words to express, but now that I'm at the end of this incredible experience I have found a sense of purpose, wonder and longing.

It's a feeling that is very hard to describe. There's a sense of accomplishment but also one of emptiness. Invariably, now that this month-long endeavor has come to an end, I'm left to wonder: what's next?

But I think I may have the answer to that. Coming to Europe has only stoked my desire to travel, further and farther, to experience all that the world has to offer, to take a Global Tour, if you will. And if I'm able to beat the odds, perhaps next year I'll wash upon the shores of Japan and see first-hand what wonders lie in wait in the Land of the Rising Sun.

Until then, I can only dream.

Goodnight, London.
Goodbye, Europe.

It's been amazing!