

U3A Travel Club visit to Berlin, Colditz, Meissen & Dresden

Nine Travel Club members flew from Southend Airport on this Riviera holiday. We were met promptly at Berlin Airport by our friendly, knowledgeable and experienced guide, Andrew Thomas, a former German teacher who was at hand to answer questions and give advice about places to eat, visit and transport suggestions.

The Maritim Hotels used were of an 'international' standard, including fantastic breakfast choices. Definitely something for everyone. The Berlin Hotel is right opposite 'The Bender Block' in Staffenberg Strasse where Operation Valkeri, the failed attempt on Hitler's life in July '44 ended. It is round the corner from the Gemaldegalerie (Berlin's best art museum) and within walking distance of Potsdamer Platz! Berlin is an easy city to walk round, with safe pavements, easy road to cross as long as you DON'T dodge the red pedestrian light, and with clearly marked taxi ranks, train and bus stops.

It was strange to be standing on the line of the wall marked by a line of bricks embedded in the road and pavements especially in the bustling Potsdamer Platz, now surrounded by glitzy, glassy architecture, all created since the fall of the Wall, and to see photos of the death strip (in the same place) created by the East German Government.

The morning tour of Berlin zigzagged through the history of Frederick The Great, the Nazi era, DDR and EU Germany. Many sites were pointed out including Brandenburg Gate, The Topography of Terror, the Tiergarten, The Reichstag and the Zoo. In the afternoon our group made our pre-booked timed visit to the Reichstag, gradually ascending the spiral inner slope up onto the Norman Foster dome, where we had an excellent 360 degree view of the Berlin skyline, (although it was misty) and down into the seating of the parliament itself. Transparency of governance was the main impetus for the building's renovation. Some then took taxis to the Judisches Museum, others returned to the Art Gallery and some strolled back to the hotel through the Tiergarten.



The next day we left Berlin travelling south by coach for a guided tour and to visit the fascinating museum at Colditz Castle buried deep in the German countryside and not at all Disneyfied. Then onto the Meissen factory for an informative guided tour, seeing the work of the skilled craftsmen and women. Reaching Dresden in the early evening we stayed at another Maritim Hotel with its large atrium interior and glass walled lifts. The longish day was completed with another orientation walking tour. We quickly spotted where to dine in a lively restaurant with more beers and schnitzels on the menu!



The weather wasn't on our side the next morning, but our intrepid guide without an umbrella continued and so did we (under umbrellas). There was just so much to see, rain or not. After lunch Museums, galleries, churches and a schloss, were variously visited by our intrepid group. They have all been rebuilt in the original style after the devastation of the bombing.

On our final morning most of our group took the relaxing, three hour sunny trip on the smooth River Elbe, gazing at mansions and vineyards.

I think the formula of booking as a small group within a larger one worked. Plenty of opportunity to chat to others and recommend our club, because whilst having the security of a group but we are able to be independent. Riviera Travel could not be faulted. I would recommend this holiday as a good 'taster' in the culinary and travel sense. Eating out wasn't particularly expensive and there were plenty of cafes for coffee and cake. Oh! Always check the weather forecast for your destinations before travelling.

Clare Lyne