

CHRISTMAS MARKETS OF GERMANY

26 November 2019 – 7 December 2019

Mike and I decided to take a trip to experience the dazzling Christmas Markets in Germany. We signed up with Gate 1 Travel for this trip. We arrived a few days early to get settled in and feel fresh for the tour. The escorted package included Christmas Markets and sites in Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, Wurzburg, Nuremberg and Munich.

When Mike and I arrived in Berlin since our hotel room was not ready yet we had a lot of time to visit Berlin on our own. We had a taxi take us to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and information centre. The Memorial, located in the centre of Berlin one block south of the Brandenburg Gate, is Germany's main Holocaust memorial. It dates back to a citizen's initiative by publicist Lea Rosh and historian Eberhard Jackel in the late 1980s. On June 25th, 1999, the German Bundestage passed a resolution to start construction according to architect Peter Eisenman's design. Construction started on April 1st, 2003, and the memorial was presented to the public on May 12th, 2005. The memorial consists of a 200,000 sq ft field of stelae with over 2,700 concrete blocks, and the information centre which lies below (under the field of stelae). The experience was quite moving. We continued to walk to Panorama Punkt located in Potsdamer Platz Arkaden with a terrace on the 25th floor for a 360 degree panoramic view of Berlin. We took the fastest elevator in Europe for fantastic views. Afterwards we stopped in the café on the 24th floor so Mike could have a cup of coffee. From above we could see inside the courtyard at Sony's German headquarters filled with colored lights. We walked into the courtyard which was decorated with a large stylized tree made of blue colored lights and a large walk through arch of white lights. Many Christmas trees and lighted figures lined the courtyard. As you exited the courtyard there stood a very large giraffe made out of legos. The Legoland Discovery Centre was located there. Time for lunch so we went inside a place called Ki-Nova. The menu was in German and English and making a choice was easy. I had the Schweine-Geschnetzeltes, pork slices with a Dijon-mustard crème and herbed rice. Mike had pasta stuffed with gorgonzola-cheese spinach. OK time to head back to the Park Inn Berlin hotel to check in.

Next day on our own we started with breakfast at the hotel and then hailed a taxi to go to visit the Urban Nation Museum, an international institution for art, creative projects and social exchange located on Bülowstraße 7, 10783 with free admission. Located in the neighborhood of Schöneberg with street art murals and walls. Inside the museum was a unique collection of artworks from hundreds of artists spreading across five decades and 6 continents. In one section were several scenes showing videos of graffiti artist applying their art. Quite interesting as the artist run in and start their drawing either by spray can paint, rollers or anything else they came up with. Mostly doing their work under the cover of dark or by a lookout telling them to run away someone is coming. I read about fourteen different street art terms. In recent years, property owners and even entire neighborhoods have allowed artists to "bomb" their houses or buildings. Legal walls have helped bring about the transformation of graffiti into public art. Because artists don't have to execute quickly, at night, or with one eye out for police, legal walls allow for bigger or more involved pieces that seek to beautify, moralize, empower, or entertain.

We decided to walk back towards the Brandenburg Gate and experience some of the neighborhood stores and buildings. Parts of the Berlin Wall were set up in places all around the streets. Today the old border is marked throughout the city with a double line of cobblestones. We arrived at the Brandenburg Gate an 18th-century neoclassical monument built on the orders of Prussian King Frederick William II after the temporary restoration of order during the Batavian Revolution. One of the best-known landmarks of Germany, it was built on the site of a former city gate that marked the start of the road from Berlin to the town of Brandenburg an der Havel, which used to be capital of the Margraviate of Brandenburg. The Brandenburg Gate has played different political roles in German history. After the 1806 Prussian defeat at the Battle of Jena-Auerstedt, Napoleon was the first to use the Brandenburg Gate for a triumphal procession, and took its Quadriga to Paris. When the Nazis ascended to power, they used the gate as a party symbol. The gate survived World War II and was one of the damaged structures still standing in the Pariser Platz ruins in 1945 (another being the Academy of Fine Arts). The gate was badly damaged with holes in the columns from bullets and nearby explosions. One horse's head from the original quadriga survived, and is today kept in the collection of the Märkisches Museum. Following Germany's surrender and the end of the war, the governments of East Berlin and West Berlin restored it in a joint effort. Brandenburg Gate became the main venue for the 20th-anniversary celebrations of the fall of the Berlin Wall or "Festival of Freedom" on the evening of 9 November 2009. The high point of the celebrations was when over 1000 colorfully designed foam domino tiles, each over (8 ft 2 in) tall, were lined up along the route of the former wall through the city centre. The domino "wall" was then toppled in stages converging here.

Mike and I continued to cross the street to see the glass domed Reichstage building. The Reichstag is a historic edifice in Berlin, Germany, constructed to house the Imperial Diet of the German Empire. It was opened in 1894 and housed the Diet until 1933, when it was severely damaged after being set on fire. After World War II, the building fell into disuse. After its completion in 1999, it once again became the meeting place of the German parliament. In 1987, singer David Bowie played a concert in West Berlin, near the Reichstage. The performance was so loud, a massive crowd gathered on the East side of the nearby Berlin Wall to better hear his performance. He could hear the East Germans behind the iron Curtain, singing along. The radio station Radio in the American Sector broadcast the concert in its entirety throughout the city, with the blessings of the artists and recording labels. The Berlin Wall was built in 1961 to keep East Berliners (and all East Germans) inside East Germany. It certainly wasn't needed to keep Western citizens out. It quickly became a symbol of the Iron Curtain over Eastern Europe, the barrier between East and West that kept one side subject to the oppression of forced Communism and the other a burgeoning society of freedom and self-governance. It was in Berlin where Bowie recorded his 1977 album, "Heroes," a song about two lovers, one from East Berlin and one from the West. Living with punk legend Iggy Pop in the city's Schöneberg neighborhood, Bowie could walk outside his door and see the tyranny and death that came with living in the heart of the Cold War. The song's lyrics were so descriptive of the city's plight; it became one of Berlin's anthems.

*I, I can remember (I remember)
Standing, by the wall (by the wall)
And the guns, shot above our heads (over our heads)
And we kissed, as though nothing could fall (nothing could fall)
And the shame, was on the other side
Oh we can beat them, forever and ever
Then we could be heroes, just for one day*

Bowie played Berlin again in 1989, after the wall fell and the city was united. His last show in Berlin was in 2004. When Bowie died in 2016, the German government officially thanked him for bringing the wall down and unifying a divided Germany.

We then hailed a taxi and had him take us to 'The East Side Gallery', an open-air gallery in Berlin. It consists of a series of murals painted directly on a 1,316 m long remnant of the Berlin Wall, located near the centre of Berlin, on Mühlenstraße in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. The gallery has official status as a Denkmal, or heritage-protected landmark. It is the longest continuous section of the Berlin Wall still in existence. Immediately after the wall came down, 118 artists from 21 countries began painting the East Side Gallery, and it officially opened as an open air gallery on 28 September 1990. In more than a hundred paintings on what was the east side of the wall, the artists commented on the political changes in 1989/90. The actual border at this point had been the river Spree. The gallery is located on the so-called "hinterland mauer", which closed the border to West Berlin. The paintings at the East Side Gallery document a time of change and express the euphoria and great hopes for a better, freer future for all people of the world.

We hailed a taxi to take us to one of the Christmas Markets. The months of November and December are a truly magical period to visit Germany. Christmas is a favorite holiday for the Germans so there are lots of festivities during those months. One of the top reasons to visit during the holiday season is to experience the beautiful Christmas markets. You'll find all sorts of unique hand-crafted gifts, decorations, jewelry, clothes, silverware, toys and more. Artisans and sellers from all over Germany and Europe descend on Berlin to set up shop. We arrived at Berliner Weihnachtszeit at Roten Rathaus. This market is easy to spot because of the giant Ferris wheel at the center. It's near Alexanderplatz, which is the very center of Berlin. Situated in front of Berlin's Town Hall, the Roten Rathaus Christmas market is one of the oldest in the city. There were so many different types of sausages and German food also many German beers (especially the wheat kind). I don't drink beer but the Gluhwein was good. It's a hot, mulled wine with hints of cinnamon, cloves, and a couple of other spices. Mike and I rode the ferris wheel and then walked around the market and watched adults and children at the ice skating rink. We then went over to the Alexanderplatz Christmas Market just outside our hotel. with more than 5000 lights. It is the biggest walk-in Christmas pyramid in Europe. On the ground floor of the pyramid snacks are available.

One more day on our own before our Gate 1 tour begins. We got a taxi to take us to the antique section of Berlin called 'The Antique Mile', Suarezstraße, which runs between Kantstrase and Kaiserrdamm.Bismarestrasse. Before going to see the antique stores we

had our taxi driver make a short stop at David Bowie's former apartment at Hauptstrabe 155. A bone china plaque is on the building at his former residence: noted: "in this house lived from 1976 to 1978 David Bowie (8.8.1947- 10.1.2016) with the lyrics from the song 'Heroes' "We can be heroes, just for one day". Bowie found inspiration in the cities surroundings, he reportedly wrote 'Heroes' after seeing his producer, Tony Visconti, kiss his girlfriend at the Berlin Wall. In this time arose the albums *Low*, *Heroes* and *Lodger*. Under the plaque on the building is a street art stencil by Marycula of David Bowie as Aladdin Sane in a space suit from Space Oddity. After looking through the antique shops we started walking and saw colored lights at the end of the boulevard. At the end was Charlottenburg Palace Christmas Market... one of my favorite markets in Berlin. About 250 vendors display and sell nostalgic Christmas crafts such as nativity figures and tree decorations. Bands were playing Christmas music, heated food tents and lots of booths selling baked goods, chocolates and mulled wines. In front of the small orangerie there is the "Regal Christmas Markets for Children", where they can ride for free on historic merry-go-rounds. I could have stayed the rest of the night but we had to get back to the hotel for welcome dinner with our group and meet our guide Thomas Jankov. Our taxi driver was not happy that we choose him to go back to our hotel because protesting in Berlin and transportation was disrupted on many streets. Some streets were blocked off making the route to our hotel difficult. Tens of thousands of people in Germany were rallying against climate change. Demos against climate change were taking place in more than 500 cities across Germany on Friday as part of a day of global action. It came as Germany's upper house of parliament, the Bundesrat, voted to block part of the German government's new climate package. Fridays for Future, led by 16-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, is calling for governments to commit to reducing CO2 emissions to stave off the worst impacts of climate change. We finally got back to the hotel and we know the taxi driver was glad to get rid of us. As we exited the taxi another young lady wanted to get in the taxi and the driver said NO and sped off. We met our group and guide and got instructions for the trip ahead.

First day with the Gate 1 tour was a bus drive to see and get time at some of the landmarks of the city including a walk over to the Brandenburg Gate and Reichstage building which Mike and I had already done earlier on our own. We drove pass the State Opera House and Berliner Dom the magnificent dome of the Cathedral Church, it marks the spot of the impressive basilica housing the city's most important Protestant church. With its elaborate decorative and ornamental designs. After the city tour the group had time on their own. Mike and I went to Braufactum for lunch and so Mike could get a craft beer. We started walking to the Berlin Cathedral and got tickets to enter the cathedral and climb the 400 steps to the dome which offered a nice views of the city. Berlin Cathedral (Berliner Dom), completed in 1905, is Berlin's largest and most important Protestant church as well as the sepulchre of the Prussian Hohenzollern dynasty. This outstanding high-renaissance baroque monument has linked the Hohenzollerns to German Protestantism for centuries and undergone renewed phases of architectural renovation since the Middle Ages. First built in 1465 as a parish church on the Spree River it was only finally completed in 1905 under the last German Kaiser - Wilhelm II. Damaged during the Second World War it remained closed during the GDR years and reopened after restoration in 1993. It gets dark pretty early so when we were

finished in the cathedral it was dark enough that when we walked back to the hotel the streets were lit up with Christmas lights and displays. We stopped and got a sandwich to and a piece of cheese cake to share back at our room at the hotel. Tomorrow would be a busy day traveling with the group to Potsdam & Leipzig's Christmas Markets.

Today's itinerary. The drive took us to Potsdam, crown jewel of Brandenburg, with its splendid gardens and palaces, named a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Here, we viewed the Rococo architectural masterpiece of Sanssouci Palace, the private retreat of Frederick the Great and continue to view Cecilienhof Palace, the site of the historic Potsdam Conference where Stalin, Churchill and Truman met in 1945 to negotiate terms for the end of World War II. Crossing Saxony, arrive in Leipzig, home of one of the country's largest and oldest Christmas markets that dates back to 1458. Set in the historical center of the city, with more than 250 twinkling stalls. We went inside St. Thomas Church, the final resting place of Johann Sebastian Bach and home to the world-famous St. Thomas Boys Choir. After the public service in the church we were able to get close to the altar and get a photo of the font. I have been searching out fonts in churches in my travels lately. After a photo shot of the font I saw on the floor the final resting place of Johann Sebastian Bach... almost missed it. Had a bite to eat at the market of seafood and of course more Glühwein (mulled wine) for Mike. We came home with six mugs that were made especially for each market we visited. Watching the kids on the rides was fun and picking out Christmas goodies to take home filled my bag immediately. This afternoon our group all traveled to the baroque art city of Dresden, on the banks of the Elbe River to settle into hotel Westin Bellevue.

Today we had a local guide to discover the city of Dresden a city that emerged from wartime destruction to splendor. We stopped at the Versailles-inspired Zwinger Palace, once setting for court festivities and the world-famous Semper Opera House. Continue to the baroque Frauenkirche Church, symbol of reconstruction with its magnificent baroque dome. A highlight of the day is an intriguing visit to the celebrated Green Vault to admire the jewels and treasures of Saxon kings. The rest of the day and evening was ours to discover Dresden's Christmas Market, traditionally called Striezelmarkt, named after the world's most famous Stollen Christmas cake. I really enjoyed visiting the Green Vault a museum located in Dresden which contains the largest treasure collection in Europe. The museum was founded in 1723 by Augustus the Strong of Poland and Saxony, and it features a variety of exhibits in styles from Baroque to Classicism. The buzz was about the recent green vault robbery where burglars stole three diamond jewellery sets consisting of 37 parts each. The guide showed us outside the iron grille on the ground floor window where the thieves entered the building. At about 05:00 (04:00 GMT) on Monday, firefighters were called to tackle a blaze in a nearby electricity junction box. There is speculation that the fire disabled the museum's alarm system. It put out some of the street lights. Police are examining CCTV footage which shows two suspects in the dark. But more people may have been involved in the robbery. I loved looking at all the priceless items in the Green Vault so much that Mike and I went back for more time in the rooms later without the group. Afterwards we went to check out Striezelmarkt. Each market had interesting people and crafts for sale. That night Mike and I went to a restaurant

called Kutscherschänke a German restaurant with great food in a rustic and quaint tavern which features historic stoves, wooden floorboards, timber framing and beautiful beams that contribute to create a warm and cozy ambiance. I had been ordering Aperol Spritz as my main drink on this trip. Mike likes his beers. For dinner I had *Überbackene feurige Hackballchen* (baked spicy meat balls, tomato sauce, mozzarella and fresh herbs) and *Geschmorte Ochsenbacken in Rotweinsobe* (braised ox cheeks in red wine sauce, bean mushroom vegetables and potato bacon cakes. Mike had *Meerrettichsobe*, *gebutterter Rosenhohl* und *Kartoffel-Selleriepuree* (smoked pork filled with prunes and onions, horseradish sauce, buttered Brussels sprouts and potato celery puree. I like to mention the food as it is worth remembering. We went back to the Christmas market for a quick look because they were getting ready to close up shops by 8:30 p.m.

Heading out today by sunrise for Würzburg, a city in northern Bavaria known for its art, architecture, and wine. Home to numerous wine bars, cellars and wineries, Würzburg is the center of the Franconian wine country, with its distinctive *Bocksbeutel* (bottles with flattened round shapes). It's known for lavish baroque and rococo architecture, particularly the 18th-century *Residenz* palace, with ornate rooms, a huge fresco by Venetian artist Tiepolo and an elaborate staircase. We visited the palace but photos were not permitted. The vast fresco ceiling shows paintings of the four continents each represented by a typical landscape and animals (or the painter's vision of these animals) and a female allegorical figure. The most decorated room of the Southern Apartment is the *Spiegelsaal* or Mirror Cabinet. Its walls consist entirely of glass panels, decorated on the back using either paintings, or drawings engraved into a gold ground and then underlaid with dark gloss paint. All the paintings and drawings show oriental, especially Chinese, scenes. The southern part also includes the *Toskanasaal*. The highlight of the Northern Apartment is the Green Lacquered Room. Its multilayered wall coverings consist of a metallic green color decorated with paintings and golden ornaments. We had dinner with the group near our hotel the *Mercure Hotel Würzburg am Mainufer*.

Today we head to Nuremberg, Bavaria's energetic city with its history of almost one thousand years. View the historic Palace of Justice where the War Crimes Tribunal met in 1946, known as the Nuremberg Trials, and the chilling Nazi Rally Grounds where mass events were held to fuel the party propaganda. After destruction in WWII, the city has been painstakingly reconstructed, returning to some of its former glory. Since the Middle Ages, Nuremberg has been well-known for its craftsmen and artists who settled the city. Some of this delicate craftsmanship can be found at its renowned spectacular Christmas market in the Old Town which brings visitors from all over the world. The air is scented with a Christmas aroma of roasted almonds, gingerbread and hot chestnuts. Look up and see the golden angel with her white dress and jeweled crown, symbol of this magical market. We passed a structure that people were gathering by the gate surrounding the structure. On the gate was a gold ring that adults and children held up by their parents were trilling the gold ring. I asked a man what are they doing? He said it was a lucky ring. I found out later: *Schöner Brunnen* (en:beautiful fountain) is a 14th-century fountain located on Nuremberg's main market next to the town hall and is considered one of the main attractions of the city's Historical Mile. The fountain is approximately 19 meters high and has the shape of a Gothic spire. The two brass rings

embedded in the fence surrounding the fountain on opposite sides are said to bring good luck to those who spin them. I spun the rings for luck. We continued to check out some food items. Reibekuchen/Kartoffelpuffer – these German potato pancakes are deep fried and served with a variety of toppings. I got applesauce and sour cream...also you could get horseradish sauce. Then we both got a sandwich on a crusty bun with three small bratwurst sausages with some good mustard.

I saw so many cookies and candies that I would not of known what they were except our excellent guide Thomas Jankov passed out different kinds of goodies on the bus for everyone to try. One was a marzipan candy he called potatoes because they looked like small baby Yukon gold potatoes. Marzipan is made with ground almonds, sugar/honey and egg white/whole eggs and I like the taste. I'm most familiar with marzipan molded into animals/flowers and other things but not potatoes. Other treats was a biscuit called Speculaas a type of spiced shortcrust biscuit, traditionally baked for consumption on or just before St Nicholas' day in the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and around Christmas in Germany and Austria, made with flour, sugar, butter, pepper, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, cardamom, nutmeg. And Ungefüllte Schokoladenspitzen a fine unfilled gingerbread topped with dark chocolate a classic among the Pulsnitz gingerbreads. Also German Lebkuchen one of many types of German gingerbread popular at Christmastime. They have been baked in the city of Nürnberg since 1395 by the local monks. The spices had to be imported for all *Lebkuchen*, so cities with strong trading partners had an advantage over small, agricultural villages when creating new types of *Lebkuchen*. Nürnberg also had good honey production and this gave them an edge up in commercial production of their *Lebkuchen*, which began in the 14th century. In 1643, the city even created the "League of Lebkuchen Bakers". Baked on individual thin wafers (one wafer to each cookie) to keep the soft cookie from sticking to the cookie sheet. Sometimes, the recipe includes marzipan. *Lebkuchen* is often referred to as *Pfefferkuchen*, translated as "pepper cake". It's also used in a Gingerbread House and Lebkuchen Hearts. After the cookies are made, they are coated with a delicious rum sugar clear glaze. The ones we had were covered in dark chocolate. I loved the many kinds of Stollen. Stollen is a fruit bread of nuts, spices, and dried or candied fruit, coated with powdered sugar or icing sugar. It is traditional German bread eaten during the Christmas season, when it is called Weihnachtsstollen or Christstollen. Other ingredients, such as milk, sugar, butter, salt, rum, eggs, vanilla, other dried fruits and nuts and marzipan, may also be added to the dough. On the advice of our guide Thomas Jankov I purchased my take home Stollen in a shop in Dresden. Dresden Stollen (originally Striezel), a moist, heavy bread filled with fruit, was first mentioned in an official document in 1474, and *Dresdner Stollen* remains notable and available, amongst other places, at the Dresden Christmas market, the Striezelmarkt. Dresden Stollen is produced in the city of Dresden and distinguished by a special seal depicting King Augustus II the Strong. This "official" Stollen is produced by only 150 Dresden bakers.

Bright and early the next day we took the autobahn to Munich. The Autobahn is the federal controlled-access highway system in Germany. The official German term is Bundesautobahn, which translates as "federal motorway". The literal meaning of the

word Bundesautobahn is "Federal Auto Track". German *Autobahnen* are widely known for having no federally mandated speed limit for some classes of vehicles. However, limits are posted (and enforced) in areas that are urbanised, substandard, accident-prone, or under construction. On speed-unrestricted stretches, an advisory speed limit (*Richtgeschwindigkeit*) of 130 kilometres per hour (81 mph) applies. While driving faster is not illegal as such in the absence of a speed limit, it can cause an increased liability in the case of a collision (which the mandatory auto insurance has to cover); courts have ruled that an "ideal driver" who is exempt from absolute liability for "inevitable" tort under the law would not exceed *Richtgeschwindigkeit*. The traffic was interesting to watch as Mike and I had a front row seat on the bus. The traffic came to a short stop once when an official vehicle flashing lights passed us. We saw the vehicle stop and a person got out and picked something off the highway that might cause an accident. He then got back in the vehicle and traffic picked up again. Our bus driver was trying to get us in Munich in time to join the crowds to watch the famous Glockenspiel Clock by 12:00 in Marienplatz in the heart of Munich. We were unable to get there on time so we missed the colorful mechanical figures dancing at the top of the hour. The figurines represent stories from Munich's history; they perform the Schafferltanz or Cooper's dance, which was originally performed in 1517 at the Marienplatz to commemorate the end of the plague. I watched it when I got home on YouTube and it was nice. In the middle ages markets and tournaments were held in this city square. The Glockenspiel clock in the tower of the new city hall was inspired by these tournaments. Mike and I had watched a similar clock in Budapest called the Astronomical Clock when on tour there.

We passed the Olympic Stadium in the heart of Olympia Park, main venue for the 1972 Summer Olympics. After settling in at our hotel Four Points by Sheraton Munich Central we met again with our group to go to the Nymphenburg Palace. The Nymphenburg Palace, i. e., "Castle of the Nymph", is a Baroque palace in Munich, Bavaria, southern Germany. The palace was the main summer residence of the former rulers of Bavaria of the House of Wittelsbach. The *Steinerner Saal* (Stone Hall) in the *central pavilion*, with ceiling frescoes by Johann Baptist Zimmermann and F. Zimmermann and decorations by François de Cuvilliés, is an impressive sight. Acting as a grand hall, it occupies over three floors of the central pavilion of the palace. The central ceiling fresco is Helios in his chariot, accompanied by other gods. So many beautiful rooms to see. The high point for me was the Gallery of Beauties. The Gallery of Beauties (German: *Schönheitengalerie*) is a collection of 36 portraits of the most beautiful women from the nobility and middle classes of Munich, Germany, painted between 1827 and 1850 (mostly by Joseph Karl Stieler, appointed court painter in 1820) and gathered by Ludwig I of Bavaria in the south pavilion of his Nymphenburg Palace in Munich. Two additional ones were created by Friedrich Dürck. Its best-known works are the portraits of the shoemaker's daughter **Helene Sedlmayr** (wearing a lavish frock the king gave her for the sitting), the actress Charlotte von Hagn (revered by audiences in Munich, Berlin and Saint Petersburg) and the king's Irish mistresses **Marie Dolores Eliza Gilbert (Lola Montez)** and **Marianna Marquesa Florenzi**. Marie Dolores Eliza Gilbert better known by her stage name (Lola Montez) portrait was not there as it was being shown at Schloss Johannsburg in the town of Aschaffenburg, Germany. Marie was an Irish dancer and actress who became

famous as a "Spanish dancer", courtesan, and mistress of King Ludwig I of Bavaria, who made her *Gräfin von Landsfeld* (Countess of Landsfeld). In 1846, when she arrived in Munich, she was discovered by and became the mistress of Ludwig I of Bavaria. There was a rumor that when they first met, Ludwig asked her in public if her bosom was real. Her response to the question was to tear off enough of her garments to prove that it was. She soon began to use her influence on the King and this, coupled with her arrogant manner and outbursts of temper, made her unpopular with the local population (particularly after documents were made public showing that she was hoping to become a naturalized Bavarian citizen and be elevated to nobility). Despite opposition, Ludwig made her Countess of Landsfeld on his next birthday, 25 August 1847, and along with her title, he granted her a large annuity. At the start of the Revolutions of 1848 in the German states, she was forced to flee. She proceeded to the United States via Australia, Switzerland, France and London, returning to her work as an entertainer and lecturer. While in the room I also sought out the portraits of Lady Jane Ellenborough and English beauty Lady Jane Erskine. The collection was a late example of a fashion for such series, which includes an earlier one in Munich of beauties of the French court brought back from Versailles by Maximilian II. Emanuel who had spent a period there. In England there are the Windsor Beauties, eleven of the King's mistresses painted by Sir Peter Lely in the 1660's, and the Hampton Court Beauties, a later set by Sir Godfrey Kneller.

Mike and I took the bus back to the hotel to unload our luggage and get settled in our room before heading out on our own. He got in a taxi to head off to the Schwabing Christmas Market, situated in the heart of Munich's avant-garde district located right by the Münchner Freiheit UBahn station. This market was pointed out to us from the local guide in our bus on the way to the hotel. The market was different from the rest as it was primarily a juried art show. Many artisan vendors were there. I purchased a silver ring with a gold accent shaped leaf hugging a round faceted green Spinel gemstone. Spinel is a stone of hope, revitalization, and feeling the joy of being alive. The artist was Donald Cutter. I asked him if he was German and he said he was from New Mexico but married a German woman and after living in the US with her for awhile there decided to move to German and live. I had also purchased a 925 sterling silver ring design called Willow Wood custom made by artist Timo Alb, in a Berlin market that I really like. He describes the ring as "With a love of nature: a piece of jewelry for dreaming, inspired by willow wood, the ring would be light and airy. The depths of the structure have been blackened and slightly rounded towards the edge for a comfortable fit. The magic of the piece of jewelry arises from the interplay of silver and skin, a fascinating effect". A Willow Tree symbolizes nature, fertility, and life. It also represents balance, learning, growth, and harmony.

We jumped into another taxi to head off to Marienplatz (St. Mary's Square) in the center of Munich. It was full of people like all of the other Christmas markets. I had been looking for nativity displays at all of the markets and found some here in glass cases. Some of the other larger nativity displays I had seen on this trip were life size, some with live animals such as sheep in the display. The sheep were happily eating fodder left for them to eat. We heard a choir singing advent songs and saw them high up in the balcony of the Town Hall. I especially like a large store window display with animated stuffed

animals in a make believe Christmas town. The Steiff animals were going to the post office to mail their Christmas cards, shopping at stores and going to the Steiff Zoo with animated penguins waving their arms and seals balancing balls on their noses. I even saw a little house with (WC) on the door for the characters. Lots of bears, frogs, bunnies, foxes, monkeys and other animals all busy in this fantasy town. The children were so happy with their faces all aglow watching this magical display. We headed off to a restaurant that Mike really wanted to have dinner at but when we went in the waiter told us that there was no free table to have they were booked up for the evening. So we had to find another restaurant for dinner. I said lets look in this cheese shop that we saw on our way back to the main square. Right by Old Town Hall was a shop called Cheese & More by Henri Willig. Henri Willig is a maker of Dutch cheese specialties, the most well-known of which is Baby Gouda. Goat's cheese, sheep's cheese and organic cheese are examples of specialties made from our own recipes. Henri Willig develops his own cheese products in his own cheese factory and exports cheese to over 30 countries. We tried some samples and watched a young man demonstrate a cheese curler that enables you to slice wafer-thin curls of the mature baby cheeses. The young man would gather up the curls to make a flower and then put two wine pearls in the center to create a nice appetizer. OK where to eat dinner. When we had been walking around earlier I saw a place called the Ratskeller a large cellar restaurant dating from the 19th century, with regional dishes & classic decor. Mike started with was Goulaschsuppe (Goulash soup) and I had Elsasser Flammkuchen/Flamecake (Alsacian pizza thin and flaky crust, sour cream, onion, bacon and herbs). For the main dishes I had Huhnchen Cordon Blue-without ham (Free range chicken breast, filled with monastery cheese and baked in crisp breadcrumbs, homemade German potatoes and cucumber salad) and Mike had Frankischer Sauerbraten (marinated and stewed beef in burgundy sauce, red cabbage, and potato dumplings). It was a very big place, many many rooms. The food was good but I got jabbed hard in my lower back from a rude waiter that wanted to get in the kitchen. I feel he had plenty of room to past me and he could have gently touched me to move more out of the isle. The only reason I was there was because our lady waiter had Mike and I pay our bill at a register very near the kitchen. I let my pain and feeling known to a man that seemed to be in charge but he directed me to another woman that was for American complaints. I told her what had happened and that it was witnessed by another customer in the dining room (which when he saw what happen his mouth displayed disbelief). Anyways all she did was apologize for what had happen and said she would address the kitchen help and waiters in the section I had dinner at that it was unacceptable to push a customer like that. She said "Let me hug you, I am sorry". I let her hug me and Mike and I left. Guess I have to watch my back next time! In all the busy markets with lots of people everyone was very nice and no pushing or shoving was going on. Besides getting bitched out at another restaurant earlier in the trip because I ordered a pizza to share with Mike with stuff on it I would not eat. When I told the waiter I didn't want my half of the pizza (they had cut it in half and gave it to us on separate plates) the waiter insisted that Mike and I had ordered it. Well in German it sounded kinda good. Anyways I told the waiter we would pay for it but I wasn't putting it in my mouth...lol. When we left to pay for the meal we were told that the pizza was free! I apologized to the waiter and told him it was not his fault, he was right we did order it. We had ordered other things, like soups besides the pizza and drinks so I was satisfied. Mike gave him a good tip.

Our last day of the Christmas Market tour with Gate 1. I suggested to Mike that we could go on the optional excursion to the fairytale Linderhof Palace, built by “mad” King Ludwig II and Oberammergau, world-famous for its Passion Play, two of the highlights of Southern Bavaria in the high Alps. Eighteen of our group went on this excursion; some of our group had been there before or wanted to spend more time in Munich. It was a nice sunny day and snow was on the ground and covered the trees on the route to the Linderhof Palace. Linderhof Palace is a Schloss (a German term for a building similar to a chateau, palace or manor house), in Germany, in southwest Bavaria near Ettal Abbey. It is the smallest of the three palaces built by King Ludwig II of Bavaria and the only one which he lived to see completed. Ludwig already knew the area around Linderhof from his youth when he had accompanied his father King Maximilian II of Bavaria on his hunting trips in the Bavarian Alps. Although Linderhof is much smaller than Versailles, it is evident that the palace of the French Sun-King Louis XIV (who was an idol for Ludwig) was its inspiration. The staircase, for example, is a reduction of the famous Ambassador's staircase in Versailles. The symbol of the sun that can be found everywhere in the decoration of the rooms represents the French notion of absolutism that, for Ludwig, was the perfect incorporation of his ideal of a God-given monarchy with total royal power. In imitation of Versailles, the bedroom is the largest chamber of Linderhof Palace. By facing north, however, the Linderhof bedroom inverts the symbolism of its Versailles counterpart, showing Ludwig's self-image as a "Night-King." My favorite room was the 'Hall of Mirrors'. This room was used by the king as some kind of living room. He enjoyed sitting in the niche, sometimes reading there the whole night. Because Ludwig II used to sleep in the daytime and stay awake in the night, the mirrors created an unimaginable effect for him when they reflected the light of the candles a thousand times. The parallel placement of some mirrors evoke the illusion of a never ending avenue. No photos were allowed inside the palace so you have to look on the internet to see some images. The dining room, located to the east, is flanked by the pink and blue cabinets. The pink cabinet, unlike the other cabinets, had a real function. The king used it as a robing room. The dining room is famous for its disappearing dumb-waiter called "Tischlein deck dich". This table was installed so that Ludwig could dine alone here. Yet the staff had to lay the table for at least four persons because it is said that the king used to talk to imaginary people like Louis XV, Mme de Pompadour or Marie Antoinette while he was eating. For Ludwig II enjoyed the company of those people and admired them. You can find portraits of them in the cabinets, and scenes of their lives everywhere in the palace's rooms. The Bedchamber: The model for this room was not Louis XIV's bedchamber in Versailles but the bedroom of the Rich Rooms in Munich Residence. This room was completely rebuilt in 1884 and could not be totally finished until the king's death two years later. The position of the bed itself on steps in the alcove that is closed off by a gilded balustrade gives it the appearance of an altar and thereby glorifies Ludwig II as he slept during the day. Meissen porcelain was everywhere the king's favorite china. The gardens surrounding Linderhof Palace are considered one of the most beautiful creations of historicist garden design, designed by Court Garden Director Carl von Effner. The park combines elements of Renaissance and Baroque formal gardens with landscaped sections that are similar to the English landscape garden.

Mike and I walked in the gardens up the thirty marble steps to the terrace with the Music Pavilion overlooking the gardens, the Neptune fountain, and the Palace. The structures and statues were protected in special made boxes for the winter. I purchased a post card in the shop that shows the Palace and gardens in the spring and summer. There was a paved walk that took people further into the woods that we did not take but I read there is a Venus Grotto built for the King as an illustration of the First Act of Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. Ludwig liked to be rowed over the lake in his golden swan-boat but at the same time he wanted his own blue grotto of Capri. Therefore, 24 dynamos had been installed and so already in the time of Ludwig II it was possible to illuminate the grotto in changing colours. The grotto is closed to visitors through 2024 for reconstruction and restoration.

Our next stop on this excursion was to Oberammergau a town in the Bavarian Alps, Germany. It's known for its once-a-decade performance of the Passion Play in the Passion Play Theater. About half the inhabitants of Oberammergau took part in the once-a-decade Passion Play in 2010. Over 2,000 villagers performed the story of the Passion of Jesus for the audiences from around the world. This was a labor-intensive community enterprise, in which only natives of the village could participate. Performances have taken place between mid-May and early October. The village is also known as the home of a long tradition of woodcarving; the Bavarian State Woodcarving School is located there. Among the celebrated former students is the German artist Wolfram Aichele. His processional church staff depicting Christ on a donkey can be seen in the church of St. Peter and St. Paul. The streets of central Oberammergau are home to dozens of woodcarver shops, with pieces ranging from religious subjects, to toys, to humorous portraits. Oberammergau is also famous for its "Lüftlmalerei," or frescoes, of traditional Bavarian themes, fairy tales, religious scenes or architectural *trompe-l'œil* found on many homes and buildings. Lüftlmalerei is common in Upper Bavaria and its name may be derived from an Oberammergau house called *Zum Lüftl*, which was the home of facade painter Franz Seraph Zwinck (1748–1792). I loved the murals on the sides of the buildings and the glorious backdrop of snow on covered mountain. The town was small and we had lots of time to explore the area. Some of the shops were closed for lunch. We found one opened that had tradition woodcarving. After trying to make a choice of all the beautiful woodcarving I settle on an angel in a blue dress. Most whittlers prefer to use Arolla pine wood, which grows in Bavaria but to cut costs, cheaper pinewoods have become common, as well. Mike and I wandered awhile in the cemetery with very interesting memorials by the St. Peter and Paul Catholic Church and then went inside the church. Construction of this beautiful building began in 1735 and was consecrated in the year 1749. The painting at the high altar honors the rosary, and the painting on the front domed ceiling shows the rosary being given to St. Dominic. By the altar was a glass case with a reliquary (Skeleton), inside it with Saint Amandus M. on top of the case. St. Amandus died about 650 AD, and is the patron saint of brewers and breweries.

We had the best lunch ever at the Hotel Alte Bofl suggested by our guide Thomas Jankov. I had Schwabenpfandl (pork medallions in cream sauce, cheese spaetzle, roasted onions, served in a pan with a mixed salad). Mike had Schweineschnitzel (wiener schnitzel) and a local beer. After lunch we were taken back to Munich to our hotel. With

a small break at the hotel of packing and getting ready to go home we dressed for the farewell dinner tonight with our fellow travelers. Thomas guided us to the restaurant Kuchlverzeichnis on Rosenheimer Str. Another nice meal with strudel for dessert. Strudel is a type of layered pastry with a filling that is usually sweet. It became popular in the 18th century throughout the Habsburg Empire. Strudel is part of Austrian cuisine but also common in the other Central European cuisines. Back to the hotel as “sugar-plums danced in my head (I think it was exhaustion), we tried to settle down for a short winter’s nap before leaving for the airport. OK flight home, stayed awake for four movies. Home now getting over my jet-lag.

VERY NICE CHRISTMAS TRIP ‘2019’ TO THE CHRISTMAS MARKETS OF GERMANY.

Audrey & Mike Lambert