

U3A Dénia Travel Newsletter

ISSUE 2—May 2019



This is a newsletter from the U3A Dénia Travel Team - the purpose of which is to keep you updated on what trips/ events we have organized on your behalf for 2019

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YOUR TRAVEL TEAM



Ginny Whitehead
Travel Group Leader

Chris Whitehead
Trip Organiser



Liz Jones
Trip Organiser



Graham Cromack

Trip Organiser



Gordon Clifford

Trip Organiser



Christine Parkin

Trip Organiser

RECENT TRIPS

Elvis is in the Building

U3A Trip to Benidorm Palace

We had a most enjoyable trip to Benidorm and the weather was very kind to us and the sun shone. Hotel Deloix was very pleasant with great staff, lovely rooms and an excellent buffet breakfast. Some of our intrepid members also tried out the swimming pool!



Our visit to Benidorm Palace was interesting with a variety of different Elvises performing, one of whom unfortunately sounded more like Tom Jones. However, the final Elvis, the 2018 Memphis Winner, on stage for more than half an hour, was excellent with superb dance moves (need I say more) and a great voice.

Thanks to Denia Sun Travel who helped us organize the trip and especial thanks to Victor our driver.



MURCIA & CARAVACA



A really interesting short break for 42 members.

We set off from Denia and our first stop was to pick up our tour guide Guillermo in Benidorm. From the time he picked us up, he regaled us with interesting facts for the full journey. Although most of us had made the trip, at least as far as Alicante airport before, we learned a lot that we hadn't been aware of.

When we arrived in Murcia we went directly to the Santuario de la Fuensanta.



The sanctuary was built on the remains of an old medieval chapel. A beautiful interesting building in a fabulous setting. And the access quite a challenge for our driver, Salvador. We had a guided tour around the centre of Murcia before checking into our city centre hotel. The rest of the day and evening was our own to explore Murcia city.

We left the following morning for Caravaca de la Cruz to see the Running of the Wine Horses. This fiesta is held on 2nd May every year. The day starts with the parade of the horses with their magnificent coats and their riders.

We had seats booked in Gran Via to enjoy this procession. In addition there is a Moors and Christians parade.

To watch the races more comfortably, we had lunch in a restaurant which has large screens showing the races.



After our paella lunch and the end of the races, we headed for home. A tired, happy group after a busy couple of days.

The first time U3A Denia has offered this trip and one I'm sure will be repeated sometime in the future.

VIENNA, BUDAPEST, PRAGUE

DAY 1 - Vienna. A damp start

This is the first time that the U3A Dénia Travel Group has organised a trip abroad and, not content with seeing one country, we visited four - Austria, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Actually, the trip started the week before we left when we met up for a welcome drink in Restaurant Amazing. It was a great way of getting to know each other and we felt like old friends by the time we boarded the coach to Valencia airport at five am.

Leaving behind a sunny Valencia, we arrived late at Vienna airport in heavy rain and nine degrees! Our Spanish guide, Juanjo (whom we christened Gung-ho), was late meeting us as his flight from Madrid was also delayed. In the ensuing melee of luggage collection and hoards of travellers, we lost him, he lost us, we couldn't find the bus and, when we did, the traffic was like the M25 in rush hour. We were all wet, tired, fed up and hungry by the time we arrived at the hotel - and it didn't even have a café, let alone a bar! Bowed but not broken, we decamped to a café across the road to partake of beer, wine, spicy bean soup and bratwurst in that order - just the job on a cold, rainy day. That hit the spot and tired faces turned to smiles as we warmed up. Later, half of us braved the elements and visited a theme park with a ride on the iconic 120 year old ferris wheel, famous for its appearance in the 1949 film, The Third Man. The rest of us wimps opted instead to catch up with some much-needed shuteye. After a long, tiring day we all turned in early. It was still raining when we went to bed.

DAY 2 Vienna - The Hapsburg legacy

A good night's sleep and a large breakfast prepared us for an exciting day in this romantic city. We were fortunate to have the services of a most engaging, knowledgeable and amusing local guide - red jacket.

He started the tour by giving us a two thousand year potted history of the Austrian Empire, from the Romans through to the fall of the Hapsburgs at the end of the First World War. This family ruled the Austro-Hungarian Empire for 680 years.



Vienna is a city of huge majestic buildings and palaces boasting ostentatious wealth - this is Belvedere Palace:



These all became State property in 1918 after the fall of the Hapsburgs. At that time, Vienna was the fifth largest city in the world and the Austria-Hungarian Empire had 55 million inhabitants speaking 32 different languages. Now there are only eight million in Austria.

After a two hour coach tour of the most famous landmarks, we walked around the old town while our guide pointed out important features and amused us with his remarks and anecdotes. In the afternoon, we visited the Schönbrunn Palace, the main summer residence of the Hapsburgs, for a walk around the beautiful gardens. Both the Palace and gardens are a UNESCO World heritage site. That evening, some of the group were entertained to a Mozart concert in the famous Golden Concert Hall with an orchestra in period costume, while others explored Vienna by night.



Those who chose to do neither were enjoying a quiet evening over dinner in the hotel when an explosion of two coachloads full of Italian students shattered our reverie. We made a swift exit to the nearest café for the rest of the evening!

DAY 3 - Győr and Budapest.

We said goodbye to Vienna and took the motorway east to Budapest. Forgive my ignorance, but I thought Austria was a mountainous country. No, it isn't! It was as flat as a pancake as far as the eye could see with almost as many wind turbines as deciduous trees. As we crossed the border from Austria into Hungary, the wind turbines disappeared and the flat green plains gave way to rolling hills, arable crops and yellow fields of rape. We could have been anywhere in the UK.

At the confluence of three rivers and halfway between Vienna and Budapest lies Győr, our stop for lunch and a leg stretch. The sun won its battle with the clouds and lit up this most charming, pastel-coloured little town. Note the soda syphon water fountain, built to commemorate the inventor, who lived most of his life here.



A few hours later, we arrived in the capital, Budapest. Bisected by the River Danube, Buda is on the west bank and Pest is on the east. Our driver took us up to the highest point for the best view of the town with its many bridges over the meandering river. Here we pose for our first group photo.



After dinner we all congregated in the bar/ lounge area - some to play cards, many watched Liverpool's historic defeat of Barcelona on TV and the rest tried to socialise above the roar and excitement of jubilant football fans - ah, the difference a good hotel makes!

DAY 4 - Budapest - a tale of two cities

A sunny day welcomed us at the start of a three hour guided coach tour of the city. Our local guide gave us a fascinating background to Hungarian history. The two towns of Buda and Pest came into being in the 13th century, having been overrun by Mongolian invaders. Pest, the flatter of the two towns, was almost destroyed when the Danube flooded in 1838 and had to be completely rebuilt. Buda, on higher ground, fared better.

Both towns were united 1873 with Budapest becoming the co-capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Cited as one of the most beautiful cities in Europe, Budapest boasts majestic buildings flanked by tree-lined avenues and elegant squares. The neo Gothic Parliament building, on the bank of the river, is particularly striking.



Our coach stopped for half an hour so we could visit St Stephen's Basilica, but eleven of us opted instead for a coffee and comfort break at the nearest cafe. We waited forever to order, even longer to get served and had to ask three times for the bill. Needless to say, we were late back to the coach and all received six of the best from Graham.



The fabulous Central Market was our lunch venue and we spent a happy couple of hours viewing the goodies and having lunch before the coach took us to the river for an hour-long cruise, beginning with a glass of bubbly.



The day wasn't over yet and we left the boat for a short ride to The Shoes on the Danube Bank, a memorial to honour the 3,500 people, 800 of them Jews, who were killed by fascist Arrow Cross militiamen in Budapest during World War II. They were paraded to the edge of the river, told to remove their shoes, shot, then pushed in. A very sombre and thoughtful end to a most interesting, action-packed day.



DAY 5 - Bratislava and Prague

After such a beautiful day yesterday, rain greeted us this morning and became heavier as we crossed the border into Slovakia. Our lunch stop was Bratislava, a beautiful medieval town, but not such a pretty sight in pouring rain. We lunched and left, but it really deserved a much longer visit. Our driver was christened Sour Kraut after he told us that no one was allowed to eat chocolate bars on his coach. Actually, he was a very good driver and received several rounds of applause for negotiating tight bends and reversing up narrow streets, but he was such a misery! It took another four hours on the bumpy and very busy motorway before we finally reached Prague. It was a tiring day, but after a quick wash and brush up we overwhelmed the bar staff in our little hotel as we socialised before dinner.

DAY 6 - Prague - one of the most beautiful cities in Europe

Our tour began by coach with our local guide increasing our historical knowledge of the country's turbulent history. Founded in the ninth century, it reached its golden age in the Middle Ages, when Charles Bridge, the Prague Castle and the Old Town were constructed.

Good King Wenceslas ruled here in the 10th century. He was murdered by his brother and later canonised, becoming the Czech Republic's patron saint. Surprisingly, the well-known Christmas carol is unknown in the Czech Republic.

Here we all are, gathered together after walking through the amazing 17th century Wallenstein Palace Gardens, which boasts a huge 'fake cave' loggia decorated with scenes from the Trojan Wars. The ornamental pond was stocked with some seriously large and very colourful carp.



We crossed the 14th century Charles Bridge, with its fabulous view of the city, which leads to the old town centre, both UNESCO World heritage sites.



Under Communist rule until 1989, few building renovations were carried out and coal was burned extensively. This resulted in a huge amount of pollution, blackening buildings and statues, which is still apparent today.

Originating in the 12th century, The Old Town Square, which is home to the famous Astronomical Clock, is reputed to be one of the most beautiful historical sights in Europe.



The cobbled streets and spiking, Gothic architecture lend a fairy tale feel to the city.



It was difficult at times to appreciate the sights with the seething mass of humanity which coursed through the narrow streets and flowed into the square like molten lava. In the midst of all these people, we came across two U3A friends who were visiting Prague on their own. We envied them their four day break; we would have loved to have spent more time in this fascinating, historical city.

Much to our feet's relief, the long, cobbled walking tour ended in the square and we went our separate ways to have lunch. The local speciality was goulash soup served in a lidded, hollowed out loaf.



Many shops were selling 'chimney cake,' which is a hollow confection made from sweet yeast dough wrapped around a cylinder, baked on open fires and filled with ice cream and fruit. Here are some being prepared:



After lunch we had quite a long walk out of the centre to where the coaches were parked. The option to visit St Vitus Cathedral on the way back to the hotel was only taken up by half of us, the rest being too tired to add any more steps to our Fitbits. A couple of hours rest at the hotel revived us and it was business as usual in the bar before dinner and in the dining room afterwards as this was our final evening. Friendships had been cemented, new friends and memories had been made, and we had really gelled as a group.

DAY 7 - our last look at Prague

As our flight back was early evening, we were able to take the tram (ahem....free for the over 70s) back into the old town for a look around at our own pace, pick up some souvenirs, and visit the sites we'd missed the day before.

When checking in at the airport, one of our group dropped her suitcase key down the side of the luggage conveyor belt. There was nothing for it but to call out the engineers to dismantle the whole thing! The tiny key was spotted by Gung-ho, who had accompanied us as far as the check-in desks.

We took off on time and our coach was waiting for us at Valencia airport. One final hitch, and every traveller's nightmare, was that on arrival in Dénia, someone took off the wrong suitcase and left the original owners with their dirty washing. Fortunately, the swap was arranged for the next day. At the end of a very successful and thoroughly enjoyable trip, we were all home before we turned into pumpkins.

Our grateful thanks to Graham Cromack for all his hard work in organising the trip and without whom it would not have taken place, and to Bieke and Anja in Denia Sun Travel for taking care of all the arrangements.

This was the U3A Dénia Travel Group's first trip abroad, but I doubt it will be our last!

Ginny Whitehead

Trips 2019:

Guadalest and Algar Falls—14th June

Fully Booked

Xativa & Gandia—18th October



Depart Dénia for Soccorada Micro Brewery, Xativa
Guided tour of brewery in English with an explanation of the process of manufacturing craft beer. Snacks and beer tasting. Depart for Dotty train tour which takes us past the house where the Borgia family lived up to the castle. Lunch in the castle restaurant. In the afternoon a guided tour in English of the Ducal Palace, Gandia also home to the Borgia family from 1485

Price includes:

Guided tour of brewery

visit to castle

lunch

Guided tour of Ducal Palace in English

Basic insurance. Cost per person - 50€

Christmas on the Costa del Sol - 23rd Dec



Join us for a fantastic five day, four night, all inclusive Christmas break in the four star Hotel Blue Sea Cervantes in Torremolinos.

The trip includes excursions to Gibraltar and Ronda, and to Malaga to see the Christmas lights. There will be a special Gala Christmas Day Lunch.

The price - which is all inclusive (full board and all drinks) - includes driver and guide tips, Christmas crackers and mint chocolates on Christmas Day and sweets on the coach. Final price depends on the number of travellers.

During the coach journey, we will have comfort stops every two hours and a break for lunch.

To help you budget, we will take staged payments throughout the year with the final payment in October.

IF YOUR PLANS CHANGE, YOUR DEPOSIT WILL BE REFUNDED UP TO 1 OCTOBER.

Price per person in a double room:

Group 30 - 39 €532

Group 40 - 49 €499

Single Room:

Group 30 - 39 €642

Group 40 - 49 €609

If you prefer to drive, then the price is €442 per person sharing a double/twin room

€552 for a single person.

Christmas Shopping Trip - Date to be confirmed

Proposed trips - 2020:

Day Trip to Titanic Exhibition—Alicante

Day Trip to a Bodega with lunch

Day Trip to a Spa

Overseas 2 city trip

Cordoba patio flower festival in May including a visit to Guadix to a house cave and Rio Frio for a trout lunch

Christmas shopping trip

Christmas break

2021:

3 nights in the River Jucar area

Day trip to Enrique Mendosa Bodega including Altea Old Town

Full details of all the trips are on the Travel Events and Booking pages of the U3A Dénia website.

If you have any problems booking for any of the trips please contact travel@u3adenia.com where we will be happy to help.