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# ON DRY LAND

When your cruise docks, how do you make the most of your time? **Jessica Colley** shares stories of the best of Europe from the Danube to the Baltic Sea.

**R**iver, sea or fjord? Castles, cliffs or vineyards? These questions are often asked at the beginning stages of planning a cruise getaway in Europe. What you see from the deck of the boat is one important factor to consider, but what you plan to do on dry land matters too.

Consider this: are you drawn to the rich culture of Vienna or the restorative power of Budapest's thermal baths? The dynamic shopping and dining scene in Copenhagen or the countless canals and bridges of Hamburg?

Often the best European cruises combine two things: striking scenery and comfort of the cruise, along with the time for immersion into a new city. Whatever inspires your trip—the Christmas markets, the spring bloom, the latest opera season—when you cruise in Europe, you will arrive in style.

Wondering where to start? The following four vignettes highlight the best of what I found on dry land once I ventured from the comforts of my plush cabin.

## RIVER CRUISING ALONG THE DANUBE

### Destination: Vienna

The Austrian capital of Vienna is known for two things: music and dessert. I arrived in the city with an appetite for Sachertorte—a dense chocolate cake with a thin layer of apricot jam—and a commitment to hearing as much music as possible in the city that inspired iconic musical prodigies from Mozart to Beethoven, Strauss to Schubert.

These two traditions—rich cake served in leisurely cafés and

classical music on stage in an elegant atmosphere—are alive and well in Vienna. A list was required to organize my whirlwind tour: for music, I wanted tickets to a handful of the best opera houses in Vienna: the Staatsoper (State Opera House), the Volksoper (People's Opera House) and the historic Theater an der Wien (New Opera House).

For cake, an equally detailed list was necessary, striking a balance between more formal cafés and those with a bohemian flair. First up was the elegant Hotel Sacher, dating to the 1860s and home of the original Sachertorte. An equally beloved competitor is Demel, an unhurried, elegant spot. Lastly, I left recommendations aside and drifted between bohemian cafés, comparing one decadent bite to the next.

### Destination: Budapest

I stood on the edge of one of Budapest's most famous thermal baths, ready to test the steaming waters one toe at a time. In front of me, bronzed men in their late 60s were fully submerged in the healing waters, a chess game underway. The board resided above water and as the players soaked, they stroked their white beards contemplating the next move. No one was in a rush to dry off.

As far back as the second century, the Romans indulged in the medicinal waters of Budapest. There are over 100 springs in Budapest, with temperatures ranging between 70 and well over 100 degrees. On this spring day, I was joining the ranks of those who have entered the waters at Széchenyi, one of the largest medicinal baths in Europe.



Hamburg is known for its many gardens, like this Heather garden in Schneverdingen.



Budapest's Széchenyi is one of the largest medicinal baths in Europe.



Hamburg's Harbor Promenade, Landungsbrücken, is a popular spot for passing the time.

I drifted in and out of the waters of this indoor-outdoor complex, plunging into a cold pool after soaking in a boiling one. While my body reveled in the heat and water massage, my mind was drawn to people-watching: the men playing chess; the mothers chatting while watching their children; the couples sneaking kisses in a quiet corner. A visit to these well-known thermal baths of Budapest is a trip into Hungarian history—and a lesson into their comfort with nudity. My American cheeks blushed in the locker rooms where modesty was checked at the door.

Set sail on Europe's rivers: Viking cruises offers a "Romantic Danube" itinerary that includes stops in Vienna and Budapest, along with other stops such as Nuremberg.

## CRUISING ON THE BALTIC SEA

### Destination: Hamburg

Hamburg might not have the creative cool of Berlin or the legendary beer gardens of Munich, but this northern German city has other pleasures. Travelers are often drawn to the canals and bridges of Amsterdam, but are surprised to learn that Hamburg is home to over 2,000 bridges—more than Venice and Amsterdam combined. This abundance of canals (along with parks and gardens) all make Hamburg an ideal city for aimless wandering, which is one of Europe's finest pleasures.

I picked points of interest—the harbor promenade (Landungsbrücken), the old warehouse district (Speicherstadt), the historic botanical garden (Alter Botanischer Garten)—and set out on foot.

I climbed and descended bridges. I found myself at dead ends. I ate pastries with seven syllables in the name. I watched the city flicker to life at night, the lights reflecting on the omnipresent water.

There are many important museums and cultural institutions in Hamburg, but it was the street life that fascinated me: the groups of friends ducking into courtyards strung with twinkle lights to share a bottle of Riesling; the youth gathering on bridges, legs dangling, to tell jokes and stretch their curfews. I followed the local lead—Riesling, an open-air courtyard with fluffy blankets for staying warm on a cool spring evening and a hearty dinner I had no chance of pronouncing correctly.

### Destination: Copenhagen

If you've ever set foot in Copenhagen, perhaps you've seen the Nyhavn waterfront with its colorful houses and snapped photos of the Little Mermaid statue on her perch. Maybe you've strolled along Strøget and seen the Queen's impressive residence. While these landmarks are at the core of Copenhagen's history, change is underway. To feel Copenhagen's energy, you must leave the historic center.

I started in the Assistens Cemetery, the final resting place of fairy tale author Hans Christian Andersen. Some visitors make it to the grave here, but venture no further into the Nørrebro neighborhood. That's a mistake. I followed a wide path flanked by tall trees in first spring bloom to the beginning of a street called Jægersborggade. This straight stretch of road was once the type



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The Nyhavn Waterfront in Copenhagen

of district that held no appeal to visitors, but in recent years, that has changed. It's now the place to sip and nibble some of the best of Copenhagen.

To perk myself up, I started at The Coffee Collective, a micro-roastery that's serious about the art of coffee. Sipping outside and taking in the street culture is part of the pleasure of a Coffee Collective cup. Nearby is the famous Meyers Bageri—you can't miss the window full of cinnamon rolls and other tempting baked goods. The Danish reputation for design is also on display on this road, especially at Ladyfingers, a shop showcasing the work of six local jewelry designers. After shopping up an appetite, I finished my tour at Manfreds, a cozy restaurant known for its tasty small plates and wide range of natural wines.

After one sweep of Jægersborggade, I was convinced that Copenhagen is one of the most exciting places to pick up a fork in Europe.

Set sail: Holland America Line offers itineraries with stops in Hamburg and Copenhagen, along with other Baltic ports including Helsinki, Stockholm, St. Petersburg and Tallinn. **TL**

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LET'S  
GO

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Manfreds, a restaurant on Jægersborggade street, is known for its tasty small plates and natural wines.