

ITINERARY DESIGNED FOR UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON HONORS

“AMSTERDAM, BERLIN AND PRAGUE”

TUESDAY 15 - MONDAY 28 MAY 2012

DAY 1 DEPARTURE FROM HOUSTON

Enjoy full meal service on your scheduled wide-bodied flight to Amsterdam.

DAY 2 ARRIVE AMSTERDAM (3 NIGHTS)

We will be met at the airport by our tour manager/guide and transfer to Amsterdam, Holland's canalled capital city. This evening we will enjoy a **Canal Walk**, where we will view Amsterdam's canals, boats and spectacular buildings, before enjoying dinner together in a local restaurant.

DAY 3 AMSTERDAM

Our day commences with a visit to the **Anne Frankhuis**, where for two years during World War II, the Frank and Van Daan families, both Jewish, hid until their betrayal to the Nazis. In 1957, the Anne Frank Foundation took over the house, to carry out "the ideals set in the Diary of Anne Frank." We will climb to the second floor, where an *Introductory Video* is shown. We continue to the *Annex* via the revolving bookcase that hid its entrance. Our visit will also include the exhibitions on World War II and anti-Semitism. Our afternoon includes a visit to the **Vincent van Gogh Museum**, featuring nearly every painting, sketch, print, etching, and piece of correspondence that Vincent van Gogh ever produced. We will trace the great artist's artistic and psychological development by viewing more than 200 of his paintings displayed simply and in chronological order according to the seven distinct periods and places of residence that defined his short career. The impressive collection includes *Gauguin's Chair*; *The Yellow House*; *Self-Portrait with Pipe and Straw Hat*; *Vincent's Bedroom at Arles*; *Wheatfield with Reaper*; *Bugler of the Zouave Regiment*; and one of the most famous paintings of modern times, *Sunflowers*. We are free to choose a place for dinner on our own this evening.

DAY 4 AMSTERDAM

This morning we will visit the **Rijksmuseum**, the most significant and permanent collection of Holland's 17th-century Golden Age of art. The museum contains the world's largest collection of paintings by the Dutch masters, including the painting known as *The Night Watch*, by Rembrandt, as well as many other masterpieces from Rembrandt, Frans Hals, Jan Steen, and Vermeer. This afternoon we are free to explore Amsterdam with the assistance of our guide. Dinner this evening is on our own.

DAY 5 AMSTERDAM - TRAIN TO BERLIN (4 NIGHTS)

This morning we will catch a train to Germany's historic and modern capital city of Berlin. This afternoon we will take a **Walking Tour of Breitscheidplatz and Ku' Damm**, the center of the former West Berlin. The Ku' Damm is Berlin's showcase boulevard, renowned for its great cafes visited by famous writers, directors and painters. During our walk, we will see the Kantdreieck, a building containing only right angles, the Judisches Gemeindehaus, Fasanenstrasse, the Theater des Westens, the Ludwig-Erhard Haus, and the spectacular Europa Center. At the conclusion of our walk, we will visit the **Kaiser-Wilhelm Gedachtniskirche** (Memorial Church), where you will see the destructive power of war. The church was damaged heavily during WWII and has been left in its damaged state as a reminder of war and its consequences. Dinner will be together as a group this evening.

DAY 6 BERLIN (EAST BERLIN: A NEW FREEDOM)

Our morning commences with a visit to the **Reichstag**, a building destroyed by the Allies in WWII, which today is again the home of the country's parliament. The building still evokes the neo-Renaissance style it had when it opened in 1894, though a new glass dome designed by Sir Norman Foster crowns the modern version. We will go through the west gate for an *Elevator Ride* up to the dome, where a sweeping vista of Berlin opens before us on the *Observation Platform*. We continue to **Brandenburg Gate**, a triumphal arch, which stood in no man's land between East and West Berlin during the Cold War and became a symbol of a divided Germany. We will enter the *Room of Silence*, built into one of the guardhouses, where visitors gather to meditate and reflect on Germany's past, before continuing with a **Walking Tour** down the famous Unter den Linden, one of Berlin's most fashionable and important boulevards. Along the walk we will view the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, the Equestrian Statue of Frederick the Great, Humboldt-Universitat and the Deutsche Staatsoper, before stopping for a visit to the **Neue Wache**, a monument to victims of Militarism and Fascism. The building houses the mortal remains of the Unknown Soldier from the battlefields and of an unknown prisoner from a concentration camp. We will stop to explore the evocative **Bebelplatz**, a square along Unter den Linden, in featuring an eloquent memorial to the notorious Nazi book burning that took place here on the night of May 10, 1933.

Through a window set in the pavement, visitors can look below to a small library lined with empty bookshelves. Some 25,000 books were burned, all by authors considered to be enemies of the Third Reich. This afternoon we visit the **Pergamon Museum**, where we will focus on the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, housed in the north and east wings of the museum. We will enter the central hall to view the Pergamon Altar (180-160 B.C.), which is so large that it has a huge room all to itself, and some 27 steps lead from the museum floor up to the colonnade. This afternoon, we are free to explore and dine at our leisure.

DAY 7 BERLIN (BERLIN UNDER THE THIRD REICH)

This morning we begin with a specialist-guided **Infamous Third Reich Sights Walking Tour**. The once elegant Wilhelm Strasse and the surrounding streets gained a terrifying reputation during the Third Reich. On Wilhelm Platz, propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels transformed an 18th century palace into the sinister Propaganda Ministry. Off the same square, Hitler built his intimidating New Reichschancellery and close by, the bunker where he committed suicide. On Wilhelm Strasse itself, Goering built the monumental Air Ministry while Himmler's SS and the Gestapo headquarters turned Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse into the most feared address in the Third Reich. Sixty years later, some of the street names have changed but one cannot escape the Nazi past. We will examine how this past is being looked at today and conclude the tour above the exact position of Hitler's bunker, exploding the myths surrounding Hitler's fate during the last days of the war. Our afternoon will begin with a visit to the **Topographie des Terrors**, a shocking exhibition detailing Nazi crimes, housed within the former Gestapo and SS headquarters. This afternoon we will be free to explore Berlin, with dinner on our own.

DAY 8 BERLIN (LEGACY OF THE HOLOCAUST & THE COLD WAR)

Our morning begins with a visit to the **Judisches Museum**, housed in an imaginative display of modern architecture, which itself conveys something of the tragic history of the millions of Jews who lost their lives in the Holocaust. The collection focuses on Jewish history and art, as well as everyday life of Berlin's Jewish population. Next we will view the vast **Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe**, which occupies a vast site in the center of Berlin, with 2,711 gravestone-like columns. Located in the former East Berlin, the memorial was opened on May 10, 2005, 2 days after the 60th anniversary of V-E Day, signaling the ending of World War II in Europe. Underneath the monument are four large rooms whose exhibits document Nazi crimes against humanity. Our morning concludes as we view the **Jewish War Memorial** to the many Berliners who were deported, mostly to their deaths, from 1941 until the end of the war in 1945. The memorial is a life-size sculpture of a freight car with victims being dragged into it. Behind it is a 50-ft. structure listing the dates of the various death trains and the number of prisoners shipped out. The memorial stands on the site of a former synagogue destroyed by the Nazis. We will begin our afternoon with a visit to **Museum Haus am Checkpoint Charlie**, where exhibits in this small building evoke the tragic events connected with the former Berlin Wall. We will view some of the instruments of escape used by East Germans, including chairlifts, false passports, hot-air balloons, and even a mini-submarine. Photos document the construction of the Berlin Wall, the establishment of escape tunnels, and the postwar history of both parts of Berlin from 1945 until modern day, including the airlift of 1948 to 1949. One of the most moving exhibits is the display on the staircase of drawings by school children, who, in 1961 to 1962, were asked to depict both halves of Germany in one picture. We continue with a walk past what remains of the **Berlin Wall**, including a partial stretch of the wall at Bernauer Strasse and Ackerstrasse reconstructed by the government to ensure no one ever forgets. The 230-ft. memorial consists of two walls that include some of the fragments of the original wall and is mostly made of mirror-like stainless steel. We will look through the slits to see a steel plaque that reads, "In memory of the division of the city from August 3, 1961 to November 9, 1989." This evening we will explore and dine in the historic **Nikolaiviertel**, restored in time for the city's 750th anniversary, located on the banks of the Spree River. This is where Berlin was born, and many of the medieval and baroque buildings in the neighborhood were completely and authentically reconstructed after World War II.

DAY 9 BERLIN - LEIPZIG (1 NIGHT)

This morning we will leave Berlin and journey south and east to Leipzig, a sister city of Houston. Leipzig is known as a city of Trade Fairs, books and music. Our tour of the city will begin at the **Thomaskirche** where Johann Sebastian Bach was a cantor for 27 years, where Mozart and Mendelssohn performed, and where Richard Wagner was christened. We will view the largest collection of Bach archives in Germany at the Bach museum before ending the day with a gentle walk around the swan lake to view the Opera House. The balance of the afternoon, we are free to relax, explore and enjoy dinner on our own.

DAY 10 LEIPZIG - MEISSEN - PRAGUE (4 NIGHTS)

On our way to Prague we will stop in Meissen. It was in Meissen that alchemist Johann Friedrich Bottger discovered that by using kaolin (china clay) he could replicate the white hard-paste porcelain that, until then, could only be made in China. In 1710, the Royal Saxon Porcelain Manufactory was founded in a well-guarded and isolated spot to protect his precious secret. We will visit **Albrechtsburg**, the castle that originally housed the Porcelain Manufactory from 1710 to 1865. Today there is little mention of porcelain at the castle, but this 1471 structure is notable in many other regards as well. The spiral staircase is a unique feature, and it offers a breathtaking view of the town and Elbe valley. On the whole, it is regarded as one of the finest civic examples of Late Gothic architecture. We then continue to Prague where after we check in to our hotel, we will enjoy dinner together.

DAY 11 PRAGUE (THE ROYAL ROUTE)

Our morning commences as we stroll across **Charles Bridge** on our way to the winding alleys of Old Town. Charles Bridge, Prague's most familiar monument, is a haven for crafts and trinket stalls and features spectacular statues of the Saints lining each side. Our tour of the Bridge concludes with a visit to **Old Town Bridge Tower**, where we can ascend to the viewing gallery for magnificent views of Prague Castle and the Little Quarter. In the **Old Town Square**, we will congregate in front of Old Town Hall's *Astronomical Clock* to watch the glockenspiel spectacle. In addition, we will have the opportunity to climb to the top of the **Old Town Hall Tower** for a panoramic view of the city. Our afternoon begins as we explore the huge hilltop complex known collectively as **Prague Castle**, which encompasses dozens of houses, towers, churches, courtyards, and monuments. We begin with a visit to **St. Vitus Cathedral**, the dominant and the most historically important section of the castle complex. The massive Gothic cathedral features 21 chapels, with *St. Wenceslas Chapel* being the most important. During our walk through the complex, we will stroll along the **Golden Lane**, a picturesque street of tiny 16th-century houses built into the castle fortifications; and view Powder Tower, White Tower, Lobkowitz Palace, St. George's Convent and the Royal Palace. We will have dinner together this evening.

DAY 12 PRAGUE (NOVE MESTO & THE VLTAVA EMBANKMENT)

This morning we will begin with a **Walking Tour through the Nove Mesto (New Town)**, featuring monuments, Prague's medieval beginnings and the Czech's rise to nationhood. During our walk we will stop to visit the **Municipal House**, a masterpiece of art nouveau architecture that features an ornate café, restaurants and a splendid concert hall. We are free to spend the balance of our day as we please. We suggest shopping along *Na Prikope Avenue*, a popular pedestrianized shopping street, or a stroll past the National Theater to the *Vltava Embankment and charming Zofin Island*, featuring quaint terraced cafes and rowing boats for hire. This evening we will meet back at the hotel for dinner together.

DAY 13 PRAGUE (THE JEWISH QUARTER & HRADCANY)

This morning we begin in the **Jewish Quarter**, where we will begin our sightseeing at the **Old Jewish Cemetery**. Founded in 1478, this remarkable site was, for over 300 years, the only burial ground available to Jews. Due to a lack of space, people had to be buried on top of each other up to 12 layers deep. Today there are over 12,000 gravestones crammed into the tiny space, but an estimated 100,000 people are buried there. We continue with a tour of the **Old-New Synagogue**, built around 1270, it is the oldest synagogue in Europe and one of the earliest Gothic buildings in Prague. Our day continues in the **Hradcany District**, where we will visit **The Loreto**, an important place of pilgrimage since its construction in 1626. The church complex is built around a copy of the house believed to be the Virgin Mary's. The original house was said to have been transplanted from Nazareth to Loreto in Italy in 1278 following threats by infidels. After the Protestants' defeat in 1620, Catholics promoted the legend, and 50 replicas of the Loreto were built in Bohemia, Prague's was the grandest and most important. We conclude our afternoon in Hradcany with a visit to **Sternberg Palace**, housing the National Gallery's collection of European art. We have time to explore the gallery, which includes works by such masters as El Greco, Brueghel, Durer, Rembrandt, Tintoretto, Goya, Monet, Renoir and Picasso. This evening we can enjoy our final dinner and explore the area around Wenceslas Square.

DAY 14 DEPARTURE FROM PRAGUE

Our tour will come to an end as our guide accompanies us to the airport for the return flight home.