

What I Did On My Summer Vacation



My wife and I recently returned from our remarkable, 2-week, active summer vacation—one that I highly recommend.

The journey began in Berlin, where we met some friends and visited the Jewish Museum Berlin and the Holocaust Memorial (off to an upbeat start, eh?!). For a novel way to view the city, we took a Fat Tire bicycle tour. Each of the 3-gear cruisers had a rubber duck for a horn, and a name printed on it: mine was Mr Pickles! We bounced around on the cobblestones and pavement past Checkpoint Charlie—the best-known crossing point between East and West Berlin during the Cold War—where you can pay 2 euros to have your picture taken with a phony guard.

Our next stop was the lovely city of Prague. We strolled across the Charles Bridge, adorned with its statues. We were driven to Terezin, a former military fortress that was converted into a concentration camp during World War 2. In 1944, the International Red Cross announced they would be visiting the site, so the Nazis installed new bathrooms (but no water) and soccer fields, organized games and theatrics, arranged for smiling children to sing songs, and successfully convinced the inspectors that the incarcerated were a group of happy campers.

At the various Jewish museums and Holocaust sites, we saw examples of the yellow stars stamped with *Jude* that the Jews were required to wear on their clothing, over their heart, to identify them in Nazi occupied territories—a symbol of identity turned into one of persecution.

On our second day in Prague, we escaped a sudden downpour by ducking into the splendid Mucha Museum. Alphonse Mucha was the accomplished artist who, among numerous works, created the famous art nouveau posters of the actress Sarah Bernhardt. The next day, we met the rest of our cycling group and were shuttled to our boat to begin the voyage down the Danube (which was rather brown, and not blue as the songs

would suggest) for a 7-day journey from Germany to Budapest. The boat would travel at night, and each day our group would disembark, hop on the saddle, and ride our bicycles for hours along the river, through farmland and quaint villages. We toured a few interesting towns, such as Passau in Germany and Bratislava in Slovakia. Vienna, with its architectural splendor, was a bit of a disappointment for the women because we were there on a Sunday and all the shops were closed. As we cycled along the EuroVelo cycling route, which goes through multiple countries, the quality of the bike paths deteriorated markedly as we left Germany and Austria for Slovakia and Hungary. At the same time, the architecture morphed from art nouveau and Gothic grandeur to Iron Curtain clunkiness. Nevertheless, Budapest at night, with its buildings illuminated, was a brilliant sight. Every day, there seemed to be a new castle or church to view or visit.

It did not take long to find out some interesting demographics on our bicycle trip. All it took was several of us wearing our Lymphoma Research Ride bicycle shirts to initiate a conversation: out of 29 riders, there were 3 survivors of lymphoma, one of breast cancer, and two of prostate cancer. Until the information was volunteered, there was no sign. They wore their history with quiet pride. Just like in our Lymphoma Research Ride (the next one will be September 27), there were no excuses for performance as they pedaled up the steepest of hills. To these survivors, cancer was not a stigma, but a battle fought and won, and it was time to ride on.

Until next month . . .

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Bruce D. Cheson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bruce D. Cheson, MD