

# Bosphorus to the Baltic on the Danube Express with Liz Gibson

Istanbul • Bulgaria • Transylvania • Hungary • Slovakia • Poland  
21 June – 5 July 2012 (15 days)

+ Optional extension to Berlin  
5 – 9 July 2012 (4 days)



Renaissance  
Tours



The Daily Telegraph

The Sunday Telegraph

THE AUSTRALIAN

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Tour Leader

**Liz Gibson**

B Art Ed, MA (Art Admin)

Former Senior Coordinator of Public Programs at AGNSW, Liz is one of our most popular tour leaders. Since leading her first tour to Russia in 2002, she has immersed herself in Eastern Europe and its interconnecting layers of history, art and culture, and led a series of successful tours through Russia, the Czech Republic, the Baltic States, Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and to major cities with strong links to Eastern Europe – Venice, Vienna, Berlin and Istanbul.

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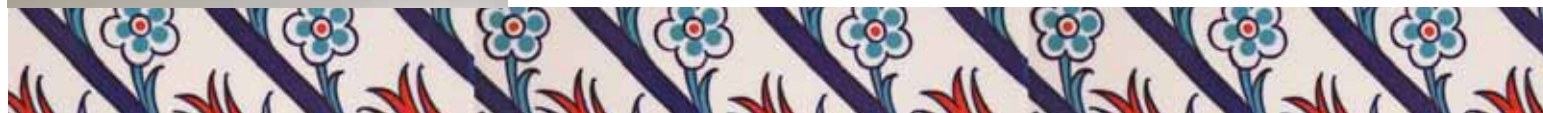
Hidden behind the Iron Curtain for decades, Eastern Europe can still present a challenge to even the most seasoned of travellers. So we were delighted to discover the Danube Express, a distinctive private train which combines modern comfort and traditional ambience, and provides the perfect way to travel in style from Istanbul to Warsaw, via Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia.

Begin with four days in the bustling, exhilarating city of Istanbul, dramatically situated on the Bosphorus, straddling East and West. Here you board the Danube Express for a three-night journey through Bulgaria and Romania, stopping at the highlights along the way. After two full days in Budapest, reboard the Danube Express for the continuation of this journey over three nights to Poland via Slovakia and the spectacular Tatra Mountains. Discover the wonderful Gothic and Renaissance city of Krakow, the Baltic seaport of Gdansk and the fascinating city of Warsaw.

Round out this magnificent journey with our optional extension to Berlin, the dynamic capital of Germany and currently one of Europe's most exciting destinations.



Danube Express on viaduct



## ITINERARY

**Thu 21 Jun 2012**

**Arrive Istanbul**

Arrival in Istanbul where you will be met and transferred to your hotel.

Afternoon at leisure before a welcome dinner with Liz Gibson and fellow railway enthusiasts. (D)

**Fri 22 Jun**

**Istanbul**

Depart the hotel for a full day tour to Sultanahmet, the Old City of Istanbul. Begin at the Hippodrome, inspired by the Circus Maximus in Rome and once a stadium for chariot racing and public activities. Continue to St Sophia, dedicated by Justinian in 537AD and for nearly a thousand years the Cathedral of Constantinople until the Turkish conquest when it was converted into a mosque. Also see the Blue Mosque, lined with 20,000 blue tiles that give the mosque its popular name.

The highlight of the day will be the visit to Topkapi Palace, the residence of the Ottoman sultans between the 15th and 19th centuries. (BL)

**Sat 23 Jun**

**Istanbul**

Continue your exploration of Istanbul with a visit to the Chora Museum. The 11th century church of St Saviour in Chora is, after St Sophia, the most important Byzantine monument in Istanbul. It features 14th century frescoes and mosaics on a gold background which greatly influenced the European Renaissance.

Take a walk in the Spice Market with its lively and colourful shops and side streets before lunch at Pandeli Restaurant on the upper level of the Spice Market. In the afternoon visit the Grand Bazaar. This labyrinth houses some 4,000 shops, 2,000 ateliers, 500 stalls, 12 storehouses, 18 fountains, 12 mescits or small mosques. (BL)

**Sun 24 Jun**

**Istanbul – Board Danube Express**

Enjoy a morning at leisure before a midday departure from the hotel. Following lunch, take a private boat cruise on the Bosphorus, the magnificent waterway between Europe and Asia and which connects the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. Transfer later this afternoon to Sirkeci Train Station for a 5:00 pm departure on the Danube Express for the first part of your journey. Settle into your compartment and later enjoy a drink before dinner as the train heads into the sunset en-route to Bulgaria. Late evening arrival at the Turkish-Bulgarian border. Overnight on the train. (BLD)

**Mon 25 Jun**

**Kazanlak – Veliko Turnovo**

Arrive this morning in Kazanlak, the centre for rose oil production from the nearby Valley of the Roses. Visit the Shipka Memorial Church, dedicated to the Russian, Ukrainian and Bulgarian soldiers who died for the liberation of Bulgaria in the Russo-Turkish War in 1877-78. Continue to the 4th century BC Thracian tomb, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Enjoy lunch back on board the Danube Express during the climb over the Shipka mountain pass heading towards Bulgaria's ancient capital, Veliko Turnovo, located on a picturesque mountain setting on the steep bank of the Yantra River. Visit the well preserved medieval Tsarevets Hill and Castle and walk through the ancient city. Return to the Danube Express for dinner as the train heads for Romania, crossing the Danube via the Friendship Bridge. Evening arrival at the Bulgarian-Romanian border. Overnight on the train. (BLD)

**Tue 26 Jun**

**Braşov – Sighişoara**

With dawn breaking the track twists and turns over the Carpathian Mountains towards Braşov offering commanding views of dense forests, crystal clear mountain streams and spectacular waterfalls. In Braşov visit the 14th century Bran Castle (known as Dracula's Castle), with its stunning mountain setting.

Lunch is served on the journey to Sighişoara, rumoured to be the birthplace of Dracula. After a walking tour of the medieval city, enjoy dinner as the Danube Express continues towards Hungary. Overnight on the train. (BLD)

**Wed 27 Jun**

**Kecskemét – Disembark Budapest**

Morning arrival at the Romanian – Hungarian border. Travel across the Northern Plain, stopping at Kecskemét to discover this town, known for its Secessionist architecture. In Lajosmizse, admire great horsemanship at a 'Pusztá' show.

Continue towards Budapest, where you arrive at Nyugati Station at 3:00 pm. Disembark and transfer to your hotel. (BLD)

**Thu 28 Jun**

**Budapest**

With a dramatic position straddling the Danube River, Budapest is made up of two cities – Buda and Pest. Begin your exploration of the city at the Castle District atop Buda Hill, dominated by the 18th century neo-Baroque Royal Palace and historic St Matthias's Church. Enjoy spectacular views from Fisherman's Bastion before crossing to the Pest side where you will see the Parliament Building, the Hungarian Opera House, St Stephen's Cathedral and Heroes' Square.



Blue Mosque, Istanbul



Veliko Turnovo, Bulgaria



Bran Castle, Brasov



This afternoon take a ride on the Millennium Underground Railway, the oldest line of the Budapest Metro system. Built between 1894 and 1896, it is the second oldest underground line in the world after the London Underground and is World Heritage listed. (BL)

**Fri 29 Jun** **Budapest**

Day at leisure to explore Budapest on your own and discover its renowned 'café culture'. You may choose to visit the Central Covered Market for some souvenir shopping. Optional excursions out of Budapest include a full day tour along the Danube Bend to Visegrad Castle, Ezstergom and the Baroque artists' village of Szentendre (optional tours available via your hotel concierge; not included in tour cost). (B)

**Sat 30 Jun** **Budapest – Board Danube Express – Bratislava**

This morning board the Danube Express again for the second part of your epic journey. Follow the Danube and enjoy lunch on board as the train heads towards Slovakia. In Bratislava, embark on a city tour of the Old Town with its narrow and winding streets, and visit the stunning castle perched high on a hill overlooking the Danube.

Enjoy a drink before dinner as the train continues its journey through the Czech Republic and the Moravian countryside. Overnight on the train. (BLD)

**Sun 01 Jul** **Krakow – Wieliczka**

Morning arrival in Krakow, Poland. Discover the Main Market Square, one of the largest town squares in Medieval Europe surrounded by palaces and old town houses including the Renaissance Cloth Hall and the Gothic Church of St Mary's. Visit Wawel Castle with its extraordinary collection of 16th century tapestries, and Wawel Cathedral, where four centuries of Polish kings and queens are buried.

Afternoon visit to the astonishing Wieliczka Salt Mine. The fascinating underground tour leads you through 2.5 km of galleries, chambers and chapels where all the altarpieces, figures and monuments are carved from salt.

During dinner, the Danube Express heads north across the Polish plain. Overnight on the train. (BLD)

**Mon 02 Jul** **Malbork – Gdansk**

After a morning tour of the World Heritage Site of Malbork Castle, a 13th century fortified monastery belonging to the Teutonic Order, enjoy lunch on board while the train travels towards the Baltic.



Sighisoara, Romania

In Gdansk, once described as the Hanseatic granary of Europe, see the Old Town harbour and its medieval crane dating from 1444, Burgher houses and the Fountain of Neptune dominated by the Greek sea god, trident in hand. Return to the train for dinner and your last night aboard the Danube Express. (BLD)

**Tue 03 Jul** **Disembark Warsaw**

Disembark in Warsaw Wschodnia Station at 9:30 am and start your exploration of Warsaw, the political, financial and cultural capital of Poland, with a half day tour. Largely destroyed in World War II, Warsaw is today undergoing a renaissance and a building boom similar to that in nearby Berlin. Drive via the Royal Route and its aristocratic residences, past the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and Warsaw's Grand Opera and National Theatre, to the wonderfully restored Old Town. Visit the 17th century Church of the Holy Cross and its memorial to Poland's greatest composer – Frédéric Chopin – and walk through the Lazienki Park, with its palaces and gardens, one of the favourite parks of the Poles. Finish with a visit to the superb new Chopin Museum at the Ostrogski Palace, designed by Italian architects Ico Migliore and Mara Servetto, which invites visitors to delve into the world of the Polish composer via cutting edge audio-visual and interactive technologies.

After lunch, transfer to your hotel for check-in. Remainder of the day at leisure. (BL)

**Wed 04 Jul** **Warsaw**

Morning walking tour of the Old Town including a visit to the 17th century Royal Castle, the former royal palace and official residence of the Polish monarchs. Visit St John's Cathedral, walk through the Market Square, and pass the Gothic fortification towers of the Barbican. At the New Town Market see the Church and Monastery of Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and the house where Marie Curie was born, and stop by the Warsaw Uprising Monument.

Afternoon at leisure, before a special farewell dinner with Liz Gibson and fellow travellers. (BD)

**Thu 05 Jul** **Depart Warsaw**

Tour arrangements conclude after breakfast. (B)



Chain Bridge, Budapest



# About the Danube Express ...

Based in Budapest, Hungary, the Danube Express is a distinctive new private train, a veritable 'Hotel on Wheels' offering a sophisticated yet relaxing way to explore Central and Eastern Europe.

The newly constructed Deluxe Sleeping Cars, with just five twin-bedded compartments each, comprise some of the finest rail accommodation available in Europe today. A harmonious blend of modern technology, stylish décor and attention to detail, each compartment features two lower beds (which convert to armchairs for day use) and an en-suite bathroom, complete with shower and toilet.

A special feature of the Danube Express are the 'retro' Dining and Lounge Cars. Enjoy fine Central European cuisine, freshly prepared on board, in the elegant yet unpretentious restaurant cars, with all meals served in a single sitting.

The wood-panelled walls, comfortable seating and softly toned décor of the lounge car create the perfect venue to engage in conversation with your fellow travellers or simply relax and enjoy a drink as you watch the ever changing landscape pass by. In the evening, this social hub comes alive as people meet for pre-dinner drinks and later, the party continues as the resident pianist plays your favourite songs. Soft drinks, house wine and beer are complimentary while spirits, premium wines and champagne are available for purchase.

## ATTENTION SINGLE TRAVELLERS

Single travellers have the choice of a full single supplement (in the hotels and on the Danube Express) or a 'partial single supplement' – whereby you have the advantage of a single room in the hotels but share a twin-berth compartment on the Danube Express, with substantial savings.

*Images from top: Lounge Car; Restaurant Car; Danube Express; Deluxe compartment (day); Deluxe compartment (night).*



# Optional extension to Berlin

5 – 9 July 2012 (4 days)

## ITINERARY

**Thu 05 Jul** **Warsaw – Berlin**

Transfer to Warsaw Central Station for a morning departure on a EuroCity train to Berlin (approx. 4.5 hours). On arrival in Berlin, transfer to your hotel for check-in and dinner. (BD)

**Fri 06 Jul** **Berlin**

Your exploration of the German capital begins with a tour of 'Historic Berlin'. From the Gendarmenmarkt – Berlin's most elegant square – and the Nikolai Quarter, drive along Unter den Linden lined with grand 18th and 19th century monuments and architecture such as Berlin Cathedral, the State Opera, Humboldt University and the Brandenburg Gate.

Lunch on 'Museum Island', followed by a guided tour of the renowned Pergamon Museum, which houses original-sized, reconstructed monumental buildings such as the Pergamon Altar and the Market Gate of Miletus, all consisting of parts transported from Turkey. The museum is subdivided into the Antiquity Collection, the Near East Museum and the Islamic Art Museum. (BL)

**Sat 07 Jul** **Berlin**

This morning's tour will introduce you to 'Modern and Contemporary Berlin'. First a drive along the Kurfurstendamm will show you the heart of the former West Berlin during the post-war era. See the Berlin Hauptbahnhof – the main railway station in Berlin, opened in 2006 – and the Spreebogen area to the north of the Reichstag building, which was chosen as the central location for the new federal government buildings. The tour ends in Potsdamer Platz, the new business heart of the city. Afternoon at leisure. (B)

**Sun 08 Jul** **Berlin**

Full day tour to the nearby garden city of Potsdam. Visit the Dutch Quarter and the Russian Colony, before a guided tour of Friedrich the Great's 18th century rococo masterpiece Sanssouci Palace.

After a special farewell lunch with Liz Gibson, visit the special exhibition of 'Friederisiko – Frederick the Great' at the Neues Palais (New Palace), organised at the occasion of the 300th birthday of the Prussian King Friedrich II. The 18th century Neues Palais is considered to be the last great Prussian Baroque palace. It contains more than 200 lavishly decorated rooms, and the tour will give you access to 70 interiors, some of them accessible for the first time. (BL)

**Mon 09 Jul** **Depart Berlin**

Tour arrangements conclude after breakfast. (B)



Brandenburg Gate, Berlin



Reichstag, Berlin



Gendarmenmarkt, Berlin



Sanssouci Palace, Potsdam



## Bosphorus to the Baltic on the Danube Express

21 June – 5 July 2012 (15 days)

### EARLY BOOKING REDUCTION

Book and deposit by 30 November and receive a reduction of **AUD 575** per person on the tour cost.

### TOUR PRICES ...

Per person, twin-share  
**AUD 11,500**

Single supplement (hotels & train)\*  
**AUD 3,950**

Single supplement (hotels only, twin-share on train)  
**AUD 1,250**

Deposit (per person)  
**AUD 500**

Final payment  
**20 April 2012**

*\* Single travellers may request to share. Please advise at time of booking.*

### TOUR CODE

RLWY – DANUBE EXPRESS

### SUGGESTED AIRLINES

Emirates flies into Istanbul via Dubai, and includes a LOT Polish Airlines sector from Warsaw to other Emirates exit points in Europe. Additional sector required if flying back from Berlin.

Please contact Renaissance Tours for assistance.

### TOUR PRICES INCLUDE

- 8 nights accommodation in centrally located 4- or 5-star hotels with daily breakfast (B)

- 6 nights on board the Danube Express with all meals
- Other meals as per itinerary (L=Lunch, D=Dinner), including welcome and farewell dinners
- Wines with meals
- Private arrival transfer in Istanbul
- Comfortable air-conditioned coach transportation throughout
- Comprehensive sightseeing including local guides and entrance fees as per itinerary
- Gratuities for local guides, drivers and on board the train
- Porterage at hotels and railway stations (1 piece per person)

### DO NOT INCLUDE

- International airfares
- Departure transfer in Warsaw
- Items of a personal nature (e.g. telephone, laundry, minibar etc.)
- Travel insurance
- Visa for Turkey, obtained at the airport upon entry (approx. EUR 15)

### YOUR HOTELS ...

Pera Palace Hotel  
Istanbul

★★★★

Le Méridien

Budapest

★★★★★

Le Méridien Bristol

Warsaw

★★★★★

*NB. Hotels of a similar standard may be substituted.*



Wawel Castle, Krakow



Old Town, Warsaw

## Extension to Berlin

5 – 9 July 2012 (4 days)

### TOUR PRICES ...

Per person, twin-share  
**AUD 1,950**

Single supplement\*  
**AUD 390**

Deposit (per person)  
**AUD 250**

Final payment  
**20 April 2012**

*\* Single travellers may request to share. Please advise at time of booking.*

### TOUR CODE

RLWY – BERLIN

### TOUR PRICES INCLUDE

- 4 nights accommodation in a centrally located 5-star hotel with daily breakfast (B)
- Meals as per itinerary (L=Lunch, D=Dinner), including farewell lunch
- Wines with meals
- First class train ticket Warsaw – Berlin
- Comfortable air-conditioned coach transportation throughout
- Comprehensive sightseeing including local guides and entrance fees as per itinerary
- Gratuities for local guides and drivers
- Porterage at hotel and Berlin railway station (1 piece per person)

### DO NOT INCLUDE

- International airfares
- Porterage at Warsaw railway station
- Departure transfer in Berlin
- Items of a personal nature (e.g. telephone, laundry, minibar etc.)
- Travel insurance

### YOUR HOTEL ...

Hotel Concorde  
Berlin

★★★★★

*NB. Hotel of a similar standard may be substituted.*



## TERMS & CONDITIONS

### How to Book

Complete, sign and return the Booking Form available from Renaissance Tours with your deposit of AUD 500 (+ AUD 250 for Berlin extension) per person. Upon receipt of your Booking Form and deposit, you will receive confirmation of your place from Renaissance Tours.

### Deposit / Final Payments

Danube Express deposit      AUD 500 pp  
Berlin deposit                AUD 250 pp

Your deposit is used to pay for hotel and rail deposits and is non-refundable in the event of your cancellation. Your final payment is due 60 days before departure. Failure to make your final payment by the due date may result in cancellation of your booking and loss of deposit.

Payment by cash, cheque, American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and Visa is accepted. A 3% service charge applies for payment by American Express and Diners Club.

We reserve the right to charge a late payment fee in the event of late booking and/or payment to cover additional communication and other expenses.

### Cancellation & Refunds

a) Cancellation by You - Cancellation charges will be applied as shown below, calculated from the day written notification is received by Renaissance Tours. In addition to cancellation fees for tours operated by Renaissance Tours as shown below, airlines, hotels and other third parties may impose up to 100% cancellation charges.

60 days or more	Forfeit of deposit
59 – 45 days	25% of tour cost
44 – 31 days	50% of tour cost
30 – 15 days	75% of tour cost
Less than 15 days	100% of tour cost

The above cancellation charges include applicable GST.

In addition to the above cancellation charges, the full insurance premium together with any existing administration fees is also payable in the event of a cancellation by the Client. If the reason for cancellation is covered by the insurance policy, you may be able to reclaim these charges.

b) Cancellation by Us - We reserve the right to cancel a tour for any reason (such as failure to reach minimum tour participant numbers). Except for force majeure or the Client's failure to pay the final balance, we will not cancel a tour less than 60 days before departure. Unless the Client fails to pay the final balance, we will return all monies paid, excluding payment for travel insurance and administration fees.

No further compensation will be paid in the event of cancellation by Renaissance Tours. A full refund of monies paid for tour costs will be the full extent of our liability. Airlines may impose up to 100% cancellation charges.

### Passports, Visas and Vaccinations

It is your responsibility to be in possession of a passport valid for 6 months after the date of your return to Australia. You are also responsible for obtaining all necessary visas, inoculations and preventative medicines as may be required for the duration of the tour. Information about these matters or related items is given in good faith but without responsibility on the part of Renaissance Tours.

### Travel Insurance

It is a condition of travel that you are covered by comprehensive travel insurance for international tours. You can make your own arrangements or your travel insurance can be arranged by Renaissance Tours. In either case all participants must provide the following information no later than 60 days prior to commencement of travel:

- a copy of your travel insurance policy (or details of master policy)
- the emergency telephone number of your insurance company
- next of kin emergency contact.

### Fitness and Participation

While our tours do not require a special level of fitness, for the overall benefit of the group, all tour members must possess a moderate level of mobility, including the ability to:

- negotiate airports and railway stations without wheelchair assistance
- use combined shower/bath facilities (it is impossible to guarantee walk-in shower facilities)
- undertake walking tour of 2-3 hours duration, including using stairs, walking over cobblestones and other uneven surfaces
- stand for long periods in museums and other sites
- embark / disembark coaches, trains and other methods of transportation without assistance
- handle your own luggage

If you (or we) have any doubts about your ability to participate in your chosen tour, you may be required to have a doctor's appraisal. This would require a doctor to read the itinerary of your chosen tour and provide you with a written confirmation of your ability to participate.

### Terms & Conditions

You can find the full terms & conditions on the Renaissance Tours booking form. They can also be found at [www.renaissancetours.com.au](http://www.renaissancetours.com.au) or we would be happy to post you a copy on request.



### TOUR ARRANGEMENTS BY –

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Your travel agent is –