Larry & Liv's 2016 Danube River Cruise

the Danube trip
August 2016
Germany
(from Amsterdam)
Prague
Aug 12-15
Czech Republic
Passau
Aug 15
Aug 16
Dürnstein
Aug 16
Melk
Vienna
Aug 17
Austria
Bratislava
Aug 18
Slovakia
Budapest
Aug 19
Hungary
Kalocsa
Aug 20
Pécs
Mohács
Aug 20
Slovenia
Croatia
Aug 25
(to Amsterdam
→ Norwich UK)
Bosnia and
Herzegovina
Belgrade
Aug 21
Aug 22
Osova
Iron Gate
Aug 22
D-T Severin
Aug 22
Serbia
Romania
Vidin
Aug 23
Aug 23
"The Rocks"
Sofia
Aug 23-24
Bulgaria
Montenegro
Kosovo
Italy

Enter Europe via the Amsterdam airport

have hours to wait between flights

Hop over to Prague

get an overview of Prague

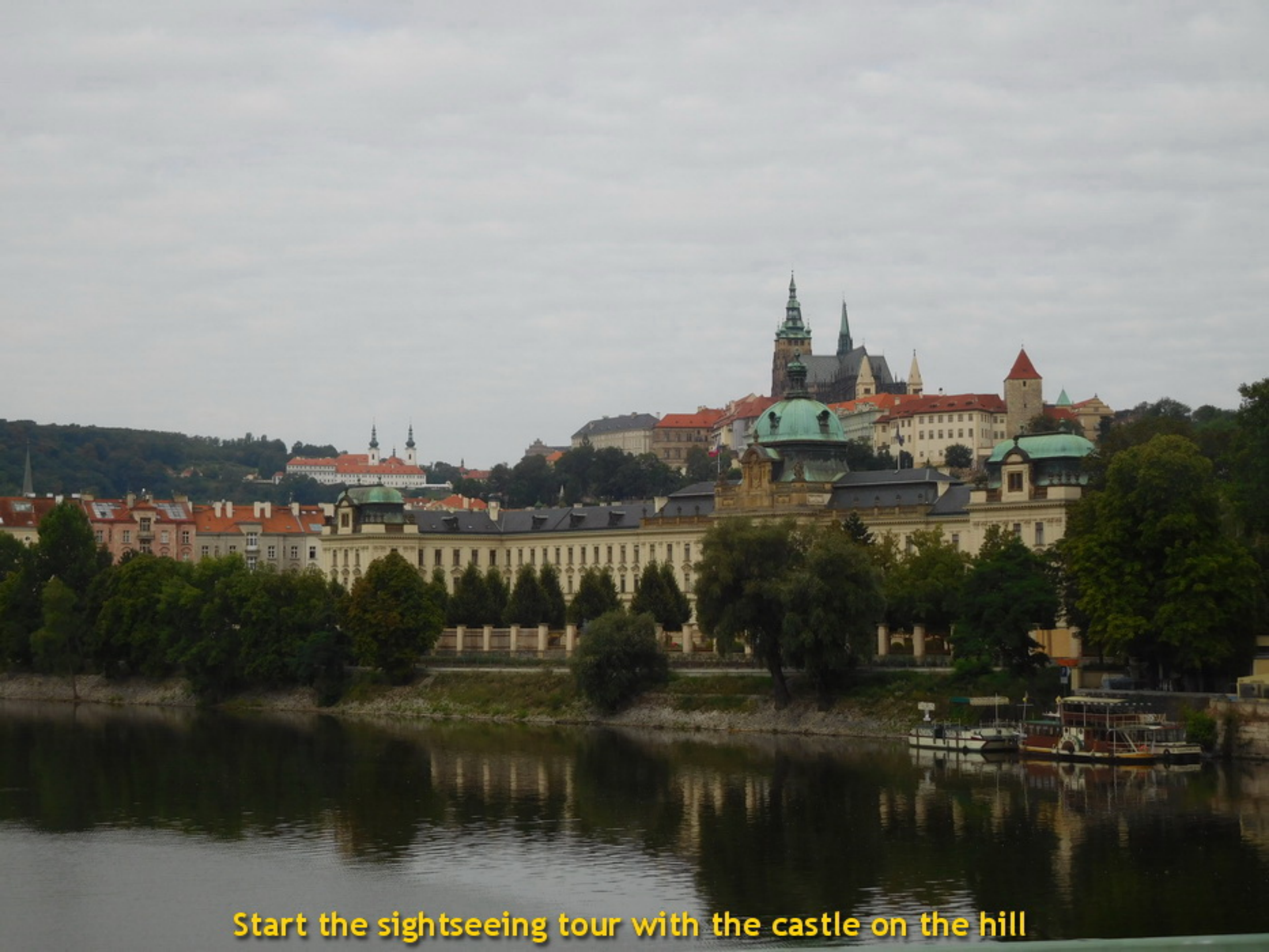
We stay at the Hotel Imperial,

which has an Art Deco style,

and a grand dining room --

-- even the bathrooms are elegant!

-- although we ate elsewhere as well.



Start the sightseeing tour with the castle on the hill

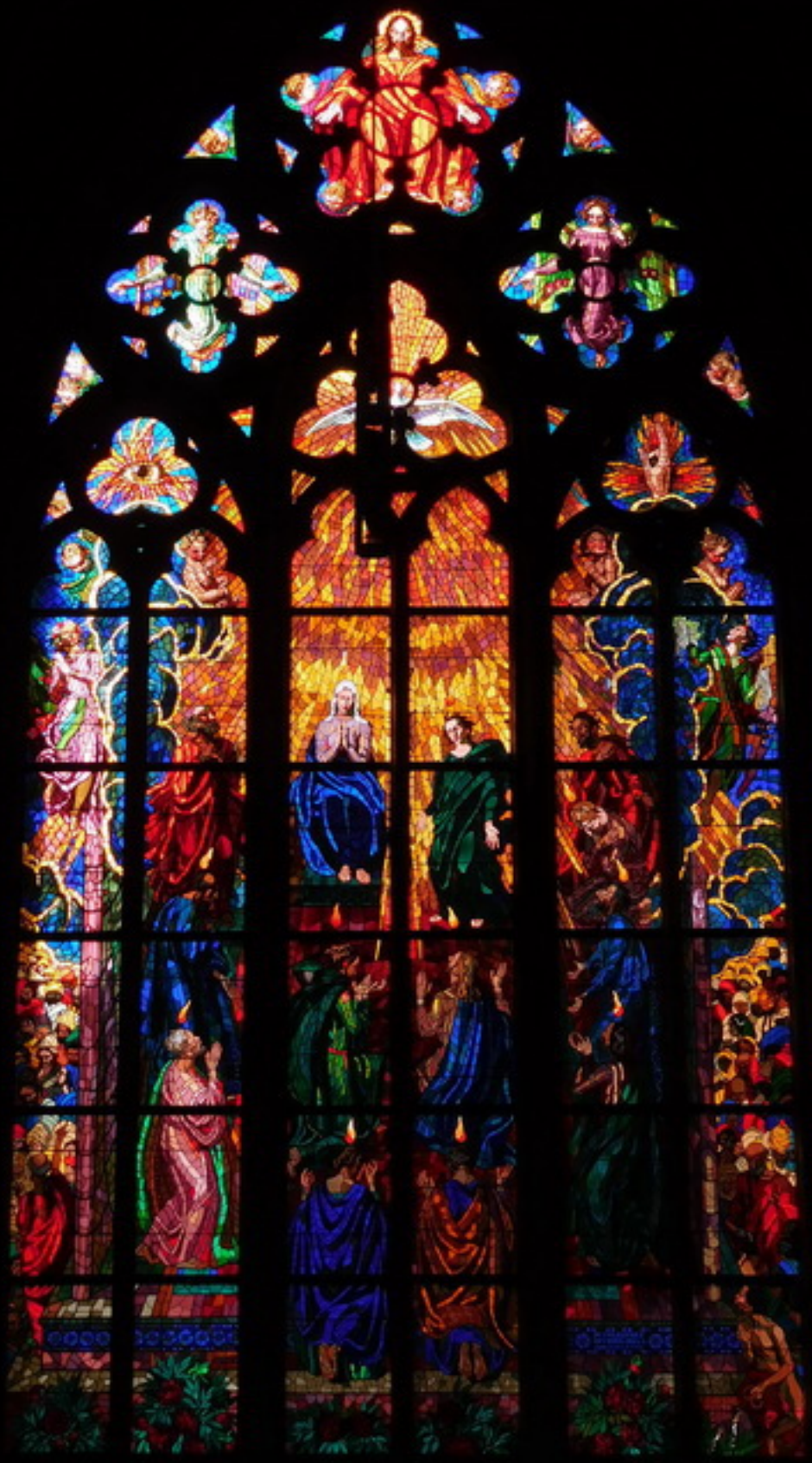
-- it is a quite impressive complex!

The Minister's flag is flying:
he's not out-of-country.

Entrance to the castle complex

Cathedral entrance

(with a commentary on all the tourists!)



an art-nouveau window by Mucha

5-star St. John of Nepomuk

5-star St. John of Nepomuk

Golden Lane, just inside the castle wall.

(it is very popular with tourists!)

View of Prague from the castle.

The Soviet-era communications tour was
voted "2nd ugliest structure in the world",
so they beautified it w/ "cherubs"

(Some spare "cherubs" are on display at a nearby park....)

251
Head into town...

... and cross the Charles Bridge over the Vltava River

past the point where St. John was drowned
(the site was miraculously marked by 5 stars)

some folks choose not to walk.

Old Town Square

the Prague astronomical clock

Clock tells time, hours since sunset, phase of moon and time of rising, Zodiac sign, & more.
ORTVS
AVRORA
OCCAS
CREP

A plaza-ful of clock-watchers.

soap bubbles as performance art

PIZZA PASTA

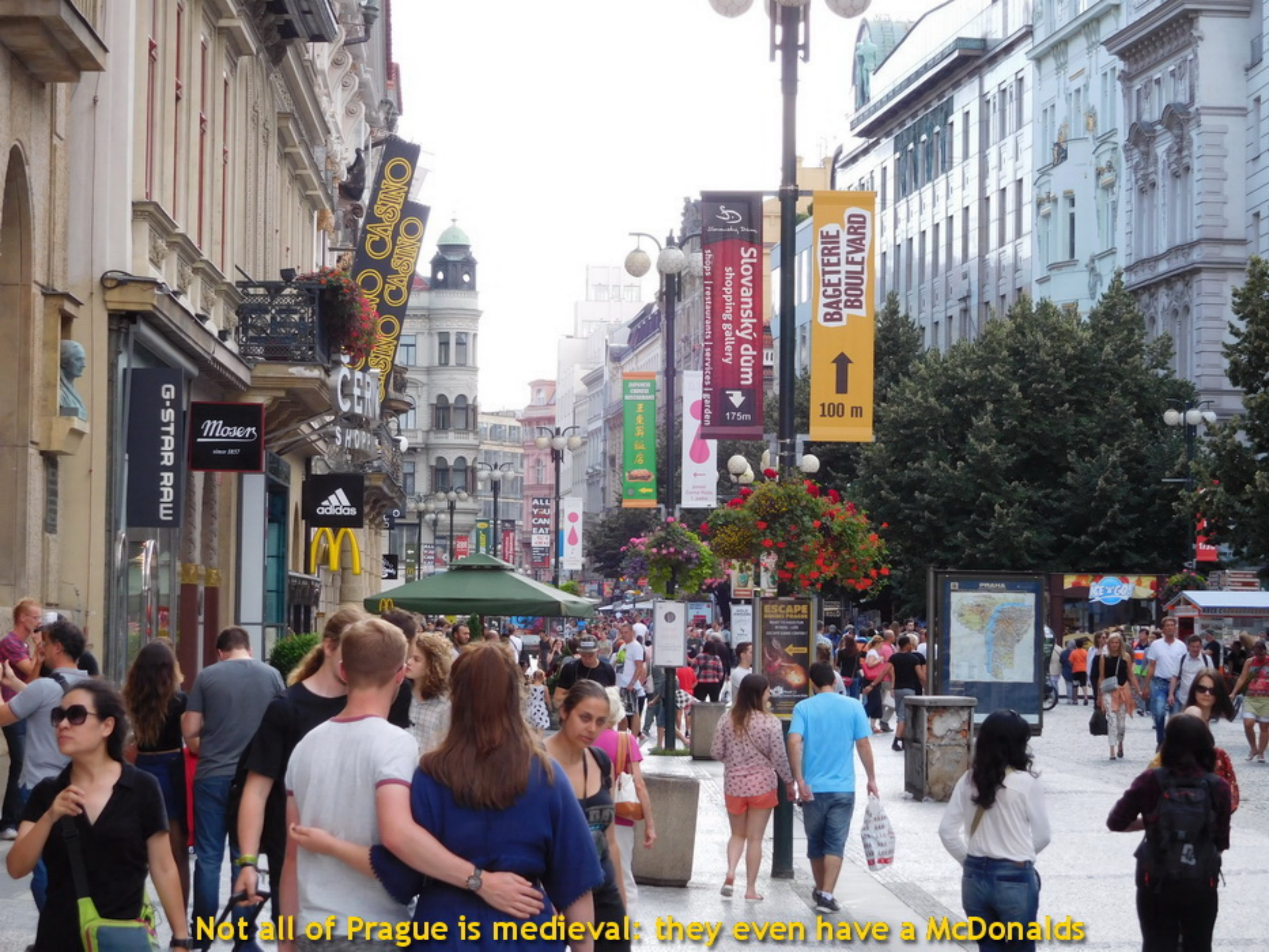
DALI
MUCHA
WARHOL

kafka
food
44
KARA

RESTAURANT
NOSTRESS

also in town that day: a Gay Pride parade

S·P·Q·P
Spo

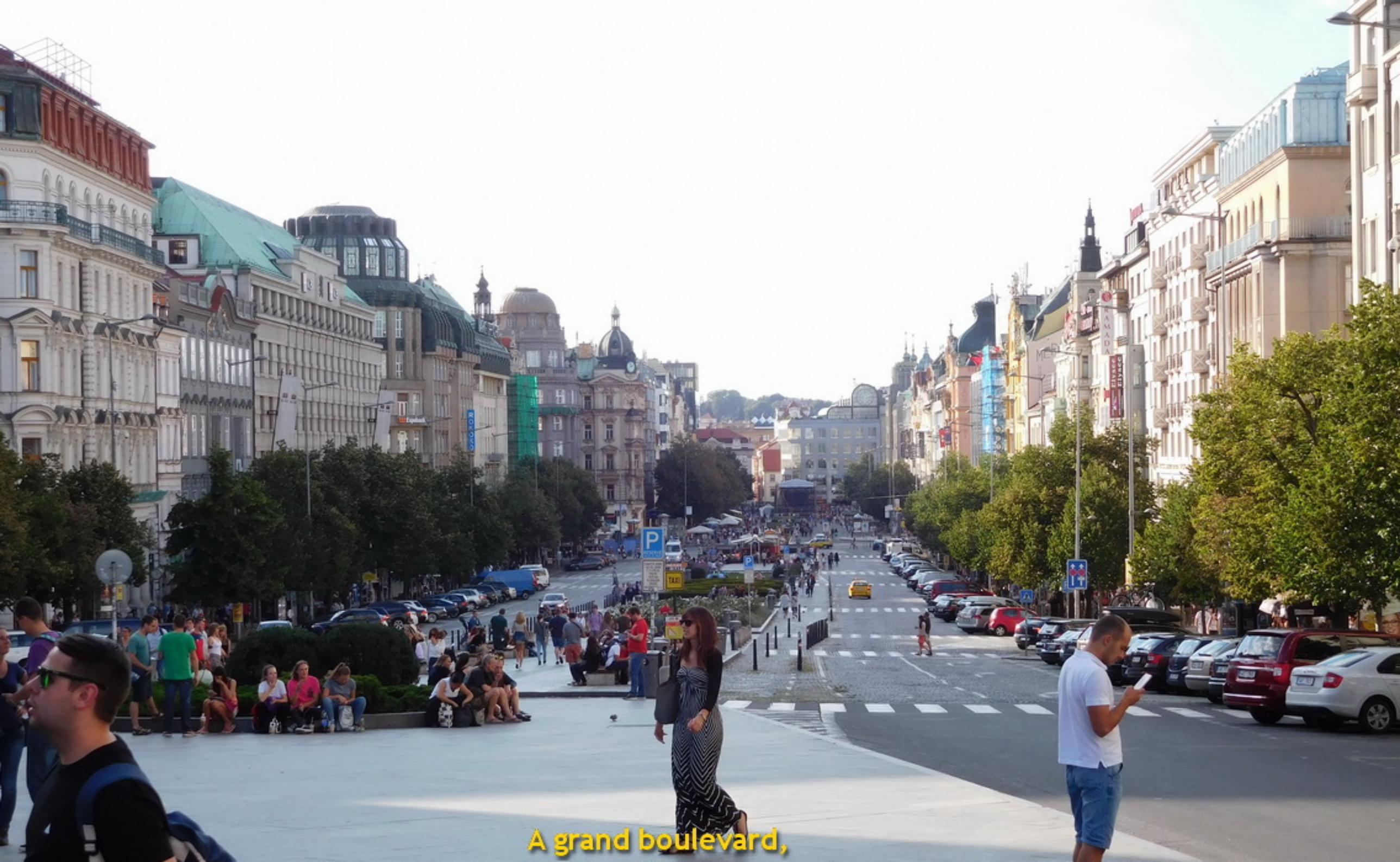


Not all of Prague is medieval: they even have a McDonalds

... and a 5-story shopping mall.

Home of Art Nouveau

USEUM


A grand boulevard,

... lined by grand hotels (but not ours)

New from Apple: the "I Want" (!)

SUBWAY

Cemetary by the Jewish Museum

The Spanish Synagogue

The Spanish Synagogue

Statue of Franz Kafka

remembrance of the Nazi oppression

The Charles Bridge over the Vltava River. (Our cruise ship is miles away, on the Danube.)

A fleet of buses take us to the Danube,

... driving past Czech countryside

... and past small villages ...

... to reach the ship on the Danube in Passau, Germany.

The small town of Passau, Germany.

Let's explore the town.

The Danube has flood numerous times over the centuries.

A very grand cathedral (St. Stephen's) for a small town,

with an ornate silver alter,

and a grand organ.

Okay, to the boat! Time to start the cruise!

Before continuing, a quick introduction to our boat, the "Amadeus Silver"

Our cabin: modern, and with a private shower

down a long hallway on the top (3rd) level.

Lectures & "Morning Briefings" in the "Panorama Lounge".

Wine and dinner, prepared by professional chefs.

And desserts!

The "library" provided a quiet retreat (and internet access).

The bar. (But, with free wine at dinner, who needs it?)

Live entertainment every night by Veselin & Irina.

The pilot in his cabin on the top deck.

A quiet aft deck.

The top deck: great for relaxing -- if only there was the time!

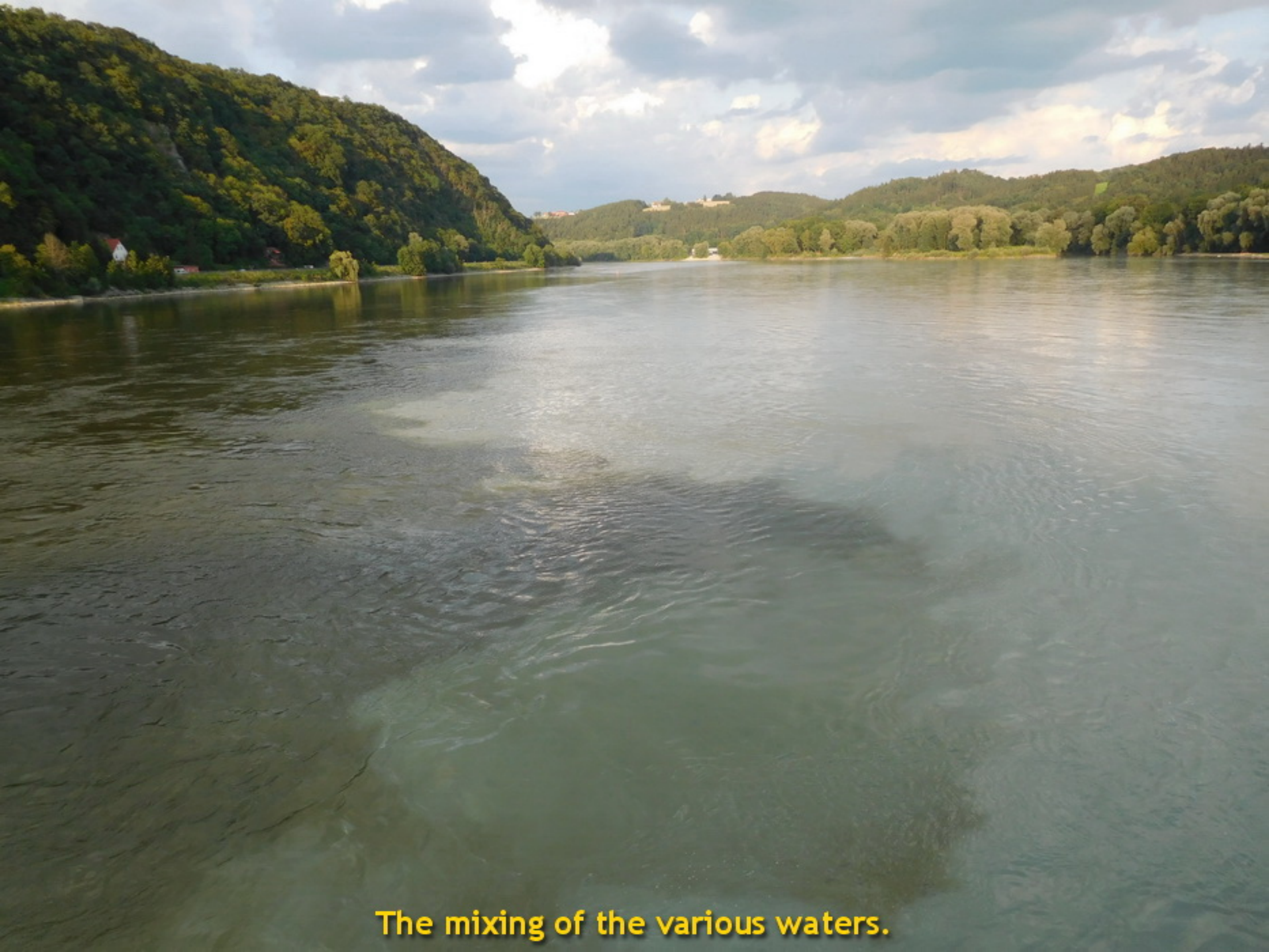
and great service!

We went as Alumni of the Univ. of Arizona (shown here w/ the ship Captain),

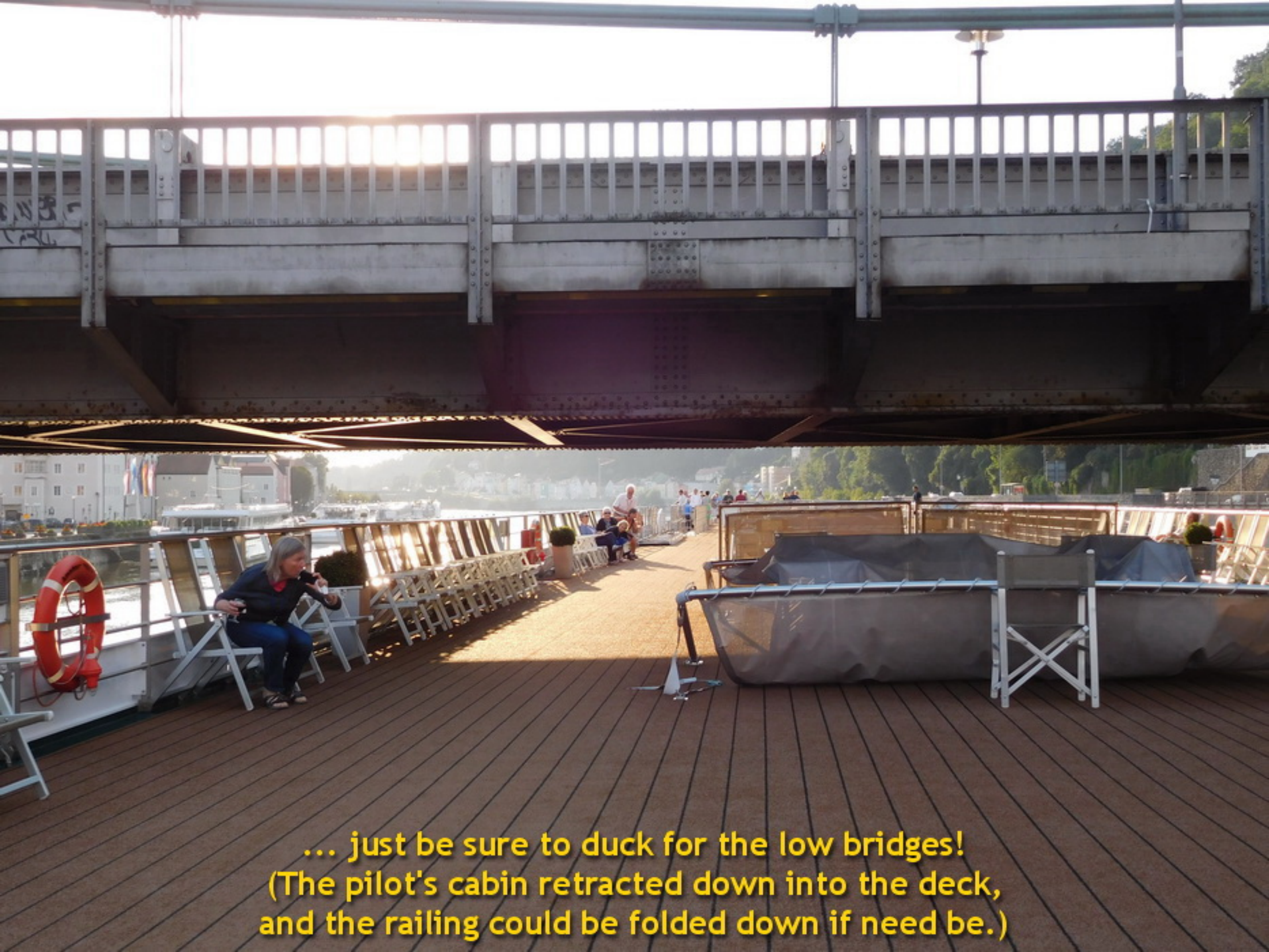
... but we also hung out w/ alumni of my grad school -- the Univ. of Wisconsin.

Start the cruise by departing Passau,

... at the confluence of the Ilz, Danube, and Inn Rivers.

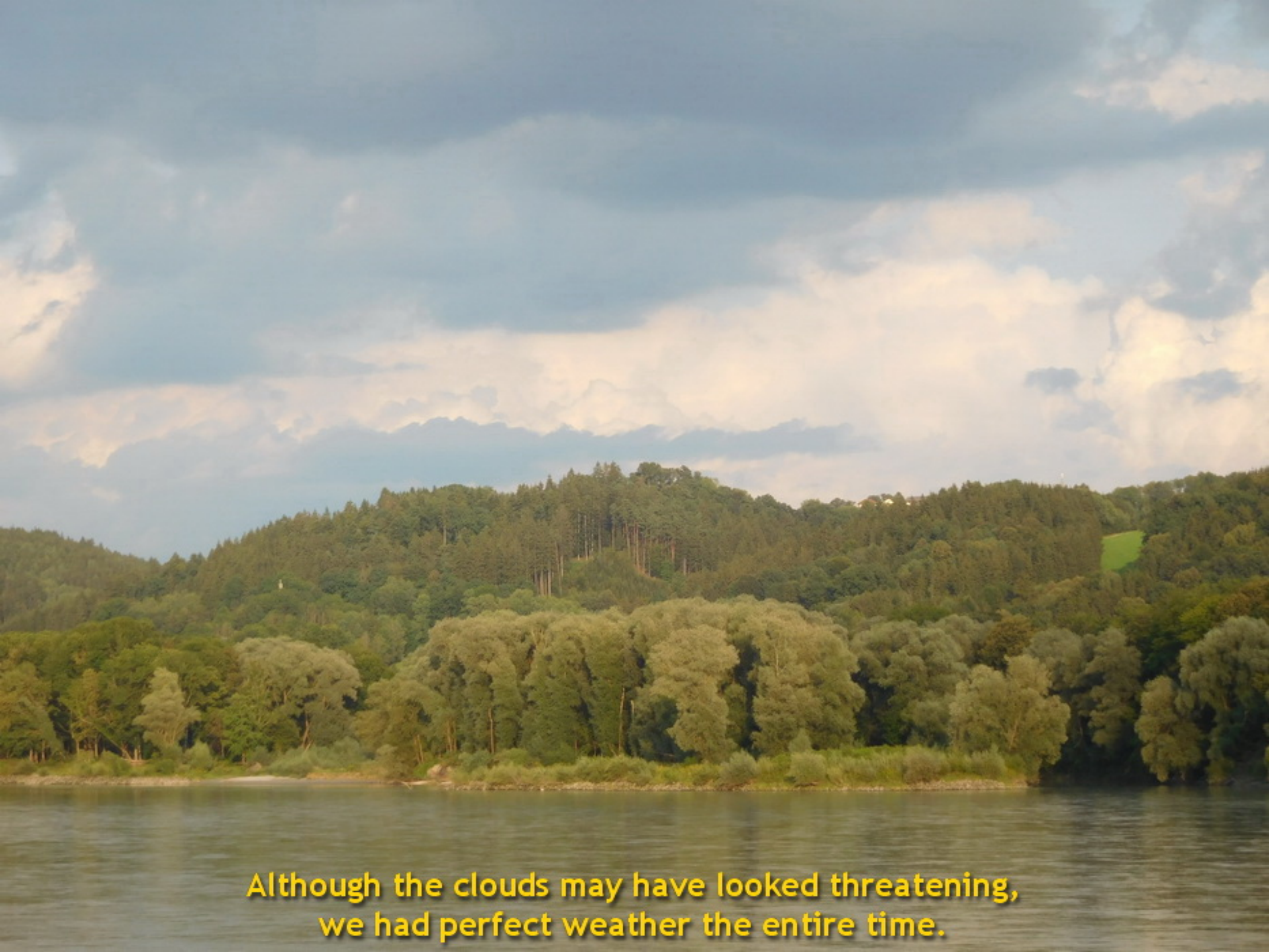

The mixing of the various waters.

It was great to be on deck and watch the world drift by!



... just be sure to duck for the low bridges!
(The pilot's cabin retracted down into the deck,
and the railing could be folded down if need be.)

a streamside village.


Although the clouds may have looked threatening,
we had perfect weather the entire time.

An excursion to tour a monastery atop a hill,

... overlooking the town of Melk, Austria.

ANNO M DCC XVIII
SHOP

The monastery had Escher-like walkways,

... and spiral staircases.

GIFT
Old Austrian buildings also had ceramic stoves...

A very grand church,

Dat duodena colorꝰ septē id decēq; decēb.
Decemb hr dies. xxxi. luna. xxviij.

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xv.	g	v.	id	Scē lucharie. u. 7 mr.	
iij.	a	iij.	id	Scē eulalie. u. 7 mr.	
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Instituta Abbatis Patris Nostri.

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monstrat / quibus ad vitam meretur / hic ordo
meti veteris nouitatis aucta doctrina mittit / hic ordo
diuinus / hic castissima vita / hoc bndictus pr constituit
sacrū volumen / hocq; mandauit suis suauiter alumnis
Simplicia q̃ familia xpi misteriis militi / late dispersitis
Aggaudet opus mōnes natōnes / via tibi meretur virtutis
net meternum flumen; Plogus simplicis modi in regulas Sci
bndicti explicit;

Incipit regula sci bndicti abbatis
Plogus eiusdem

AUSCULTA o fili precepta
magistri: et inclina aurem
cordis tui. et admonitio
ne pii patris libenter ex
cipe: et efficaciter comple
ut ad eū per obedientiam la
borem redeas: a quo per
obedientiam desidia recess
eras. Ad te ergo nc sermo dirigit: qui
quis abrenuntiamus propriis uoluptatibus

... filled with ancient manuscripts,

... and paintings of folks insulting saints.

Go on the Danube past various old castles

... in the Wachau Valley of Austria,

... past villages and vineyards,

... to Dürnstein, where King Richard the Lionheart was held captive during the Crusades.

A number of us head out on a bicycle excursion,

... up through the vineyards,

... to a wine-tasting,

... and then back down to the boat.

Float into Vienna, a large and modern city,

... and also an old one.

Get on the bus for a quick tour...

PARLAMENT

RICOH
RICOH
RICOH
RICOH

Vienna was the Imperial Capitol of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

[some of the artwork was rather violent...]

5

TI · PACIFICO
ARENTI

Another quite walkable downtown.

wüstenrot
WAGNER
WAGNER
ERSTE
ÖSTERRE

Borrow the ship's bikes: let's look for the "real" Vienna

Go past Vienna's famous Ferris Wheel

... and find a neighborhood park & garden.

... a great place for a quick nap in the sun.

Bike past the abandoned Arsenal,

... and the construction zone south of town.

But when you start to see giant pink rabbits, it's time to head back to the ship!

Next stop: Bratislava, less than 40 miles from Vienna
and capitol of the new country of Slovakia.

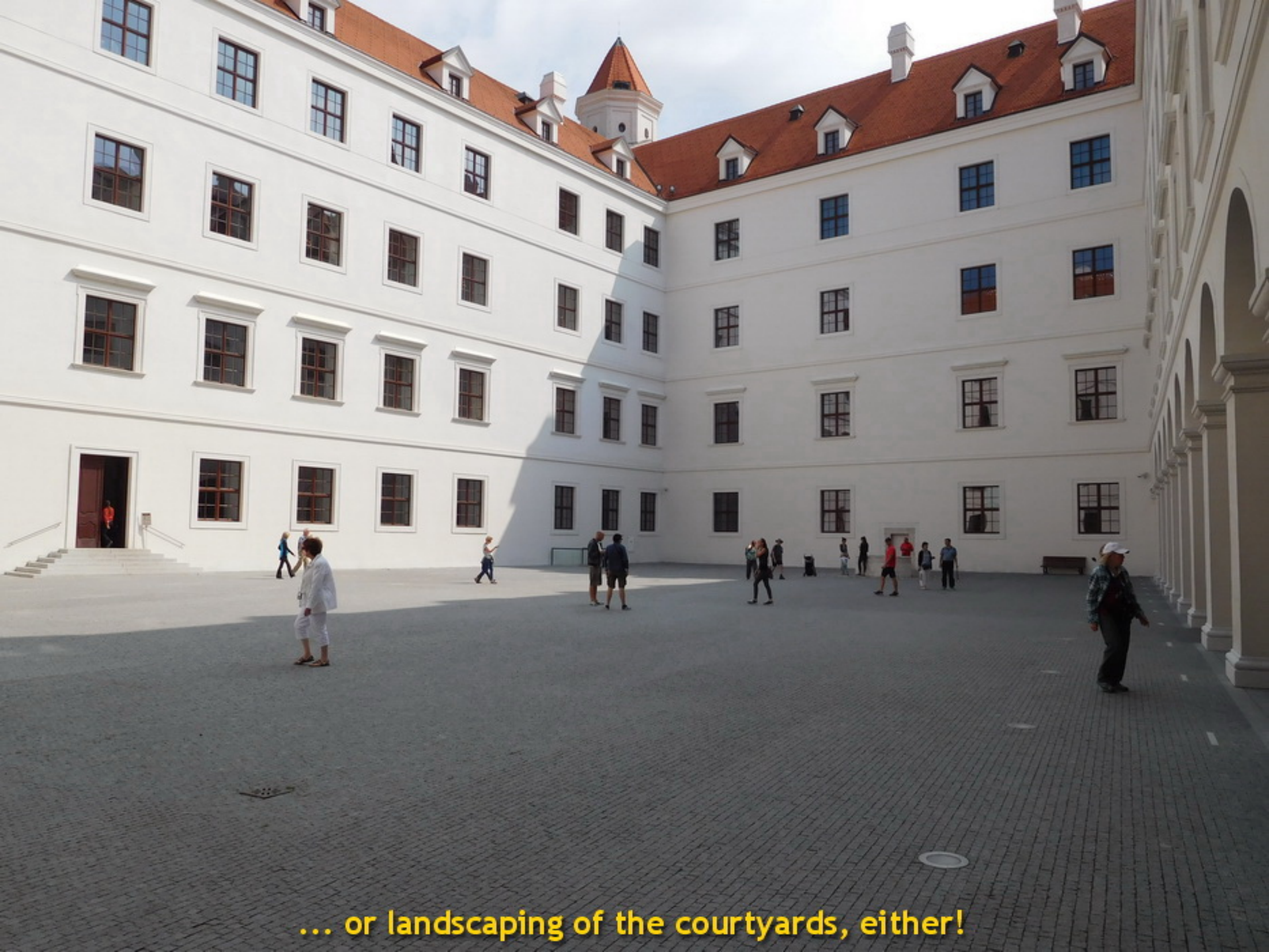
Our morning briefing, this time by a government minister,
on the Velvet Revolution and the end of communism in Czechoslovakia.

Go see the Bratislava Castle up on the hill.

Inhabitated since the Stone Age, written records from 907 AD,
"modernized" in the 1400's, burnt in 1811 and reconstructed in 1953.

Reconstructed by the communists. Note the window on the right...

... they weren't too much into historic preservation



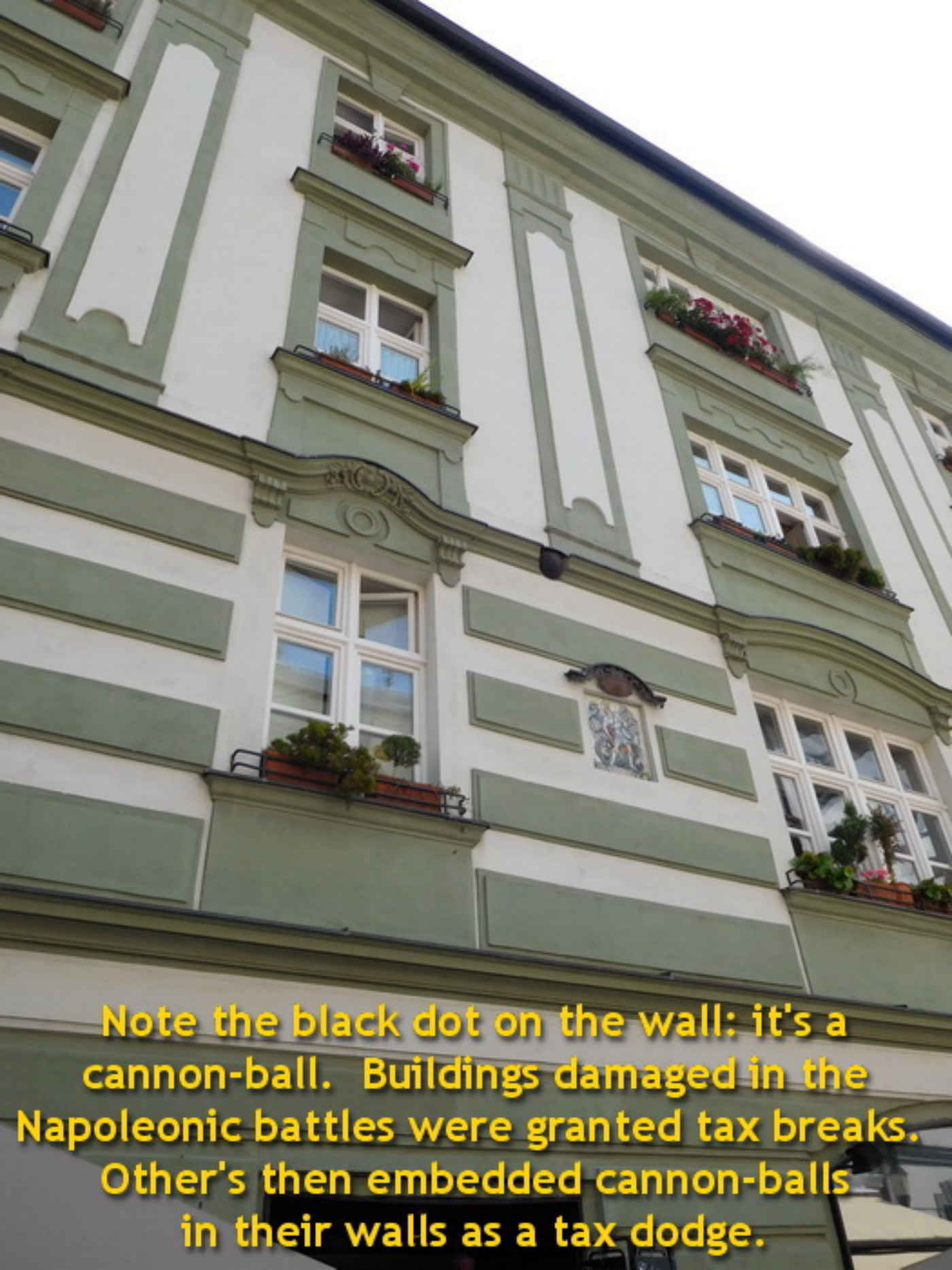
... or landscaping of the courtyards, either!

(and it looks like they never finished the sculptures...)

A view of town, and the bridge with the UFO observation lounge.

Soviet-era housing.

Venture into town.


Note the black dot on the wall: it's a
cannon-ball. Buildings damaged in the
Napoleonic battles were granted tax breaks.
Other's then embedded cannon-balls
in their walls as a tax dodge.

Another wall, another cannon ball.

Cool gnomes adorning a business doorway.

a street market

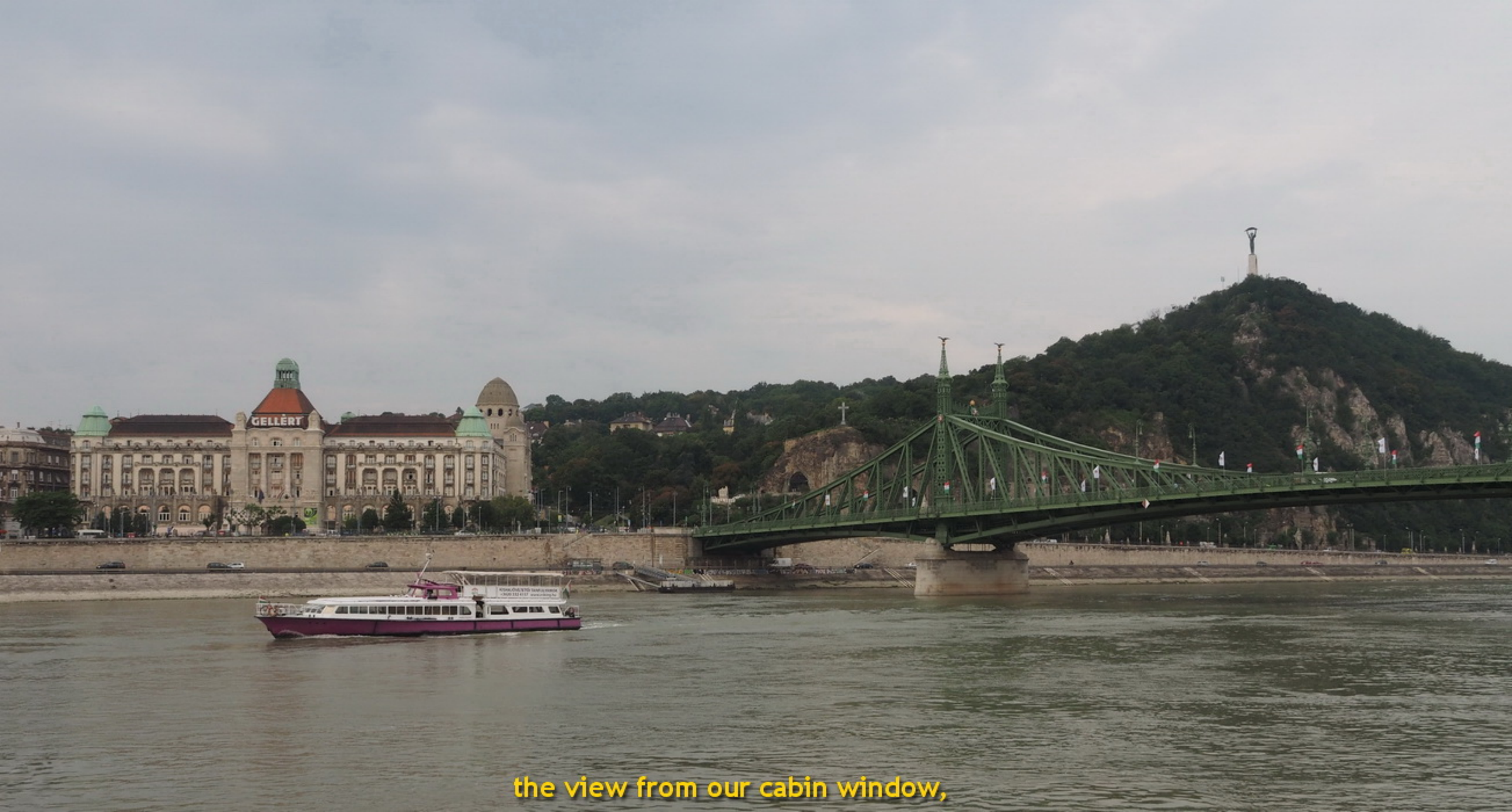
a civilized town: they have a McDonalds!

and here you can get the original Budweiser.

Cheers!

Now we drift under the "UFO Bridge"
and on to Budapest.

Budapest, Hungary

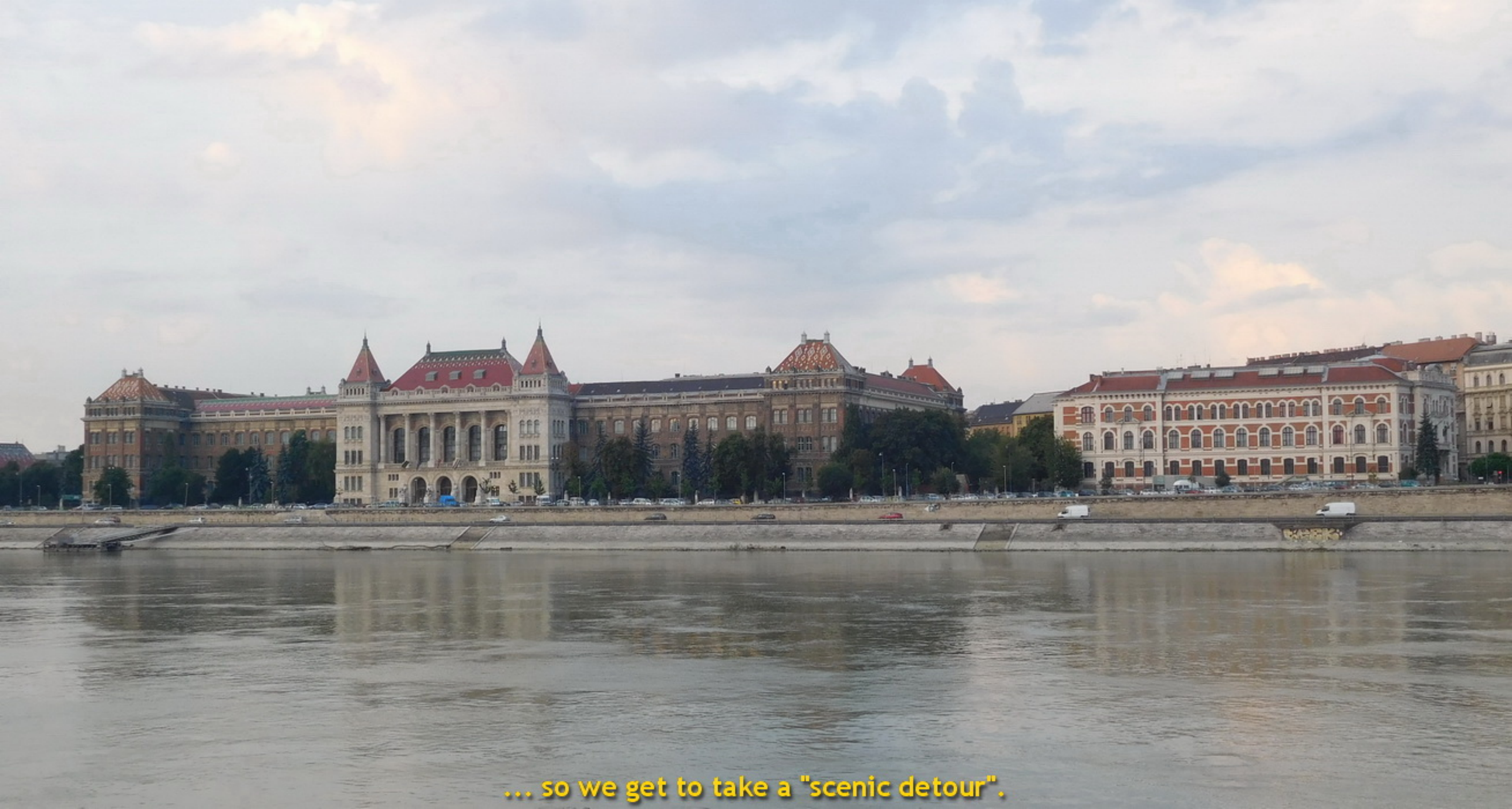


the view from our cabin window,

including "Liberty Statue" holding a palm frond.

We're going to see the Buda Castle

... however, some of the roads are closed in advance of a holiday festival,


... so we get to take a "scenic detour".

6
P

M
Bécsi kapu tér

We finally made it to within the castle walls,
but it's still a ways to the 700-year-old Matthias Church.

And the Soviet regime built
a Hilton(!) right next to the church.

Like all good castles, this one is surrounded by a wall.

... including "the Fisherman's Bastion".

By special dispensation, this saint can have a cross with a double bar.

Not to be out-done...

And the castle grounds are kept spotless.

A great view from the castle of the Parliament Building

... and the "Pest" half of Budapest.

Meander back into town...

BUDAVÁRI MÁTYÁS ÉTTEREM
30 m
P

... past Dracula's haunts ...

... and the 8-legged lion.

105
BUDAPEST

(This is a real town, with cars and traffic.)

A memorial to the Jews killed during the Second World War.
The Jews were forced to take off their shoes, then they were shot and dumped in the river:
the Nazis had a use the shoes....

"Heroes' Square"

Vajdahunyad Castle

Széchenyi Thermal Bath in City Park

City Park

Budapest is popular with the river-boat cruises...

... fortunately, our boat found a docking place.

After lunch, we explore town on our own...

Even though "Budapest Bikes" (aka "Boobies") were available, we opted to walk.

... as we wanted to explore the Central Market.

DÉLI-
GYÜMÖLCS
Narancs
ZÖLDSÉG-
GYÜMÖLCS
ORSZÁG
BT.
IZSÁKI BOROK NAGY VÁLASZTÉKBAN
B-III/6
Mák és dió
darálva is
kapható!
198
ZÖLDSÉG-GYÜMÖLCS

CENTRUM HÚS
AKCIÓ
AKCIÓ
AKCIÓ
BIRKA
BÁRÁNY
MARHA FAROK
MARHA FELSÁL
MARHA BÉLSZÍN

We went past the Jewish Museum ...

... to see the Holocaust memorial: each leaf has the name of a person killed.

TÖRTÉNELMI EMLÉKHELY
HISTORIC MEMORIAL

a shabby (chic?) district...

(at least they have cool sculptures...)

A pedestrian street (with light trees)

A fountain by the library. (The water moves like a turned page...)

A sidewalk-cafe district.

We remain in town through twilight,

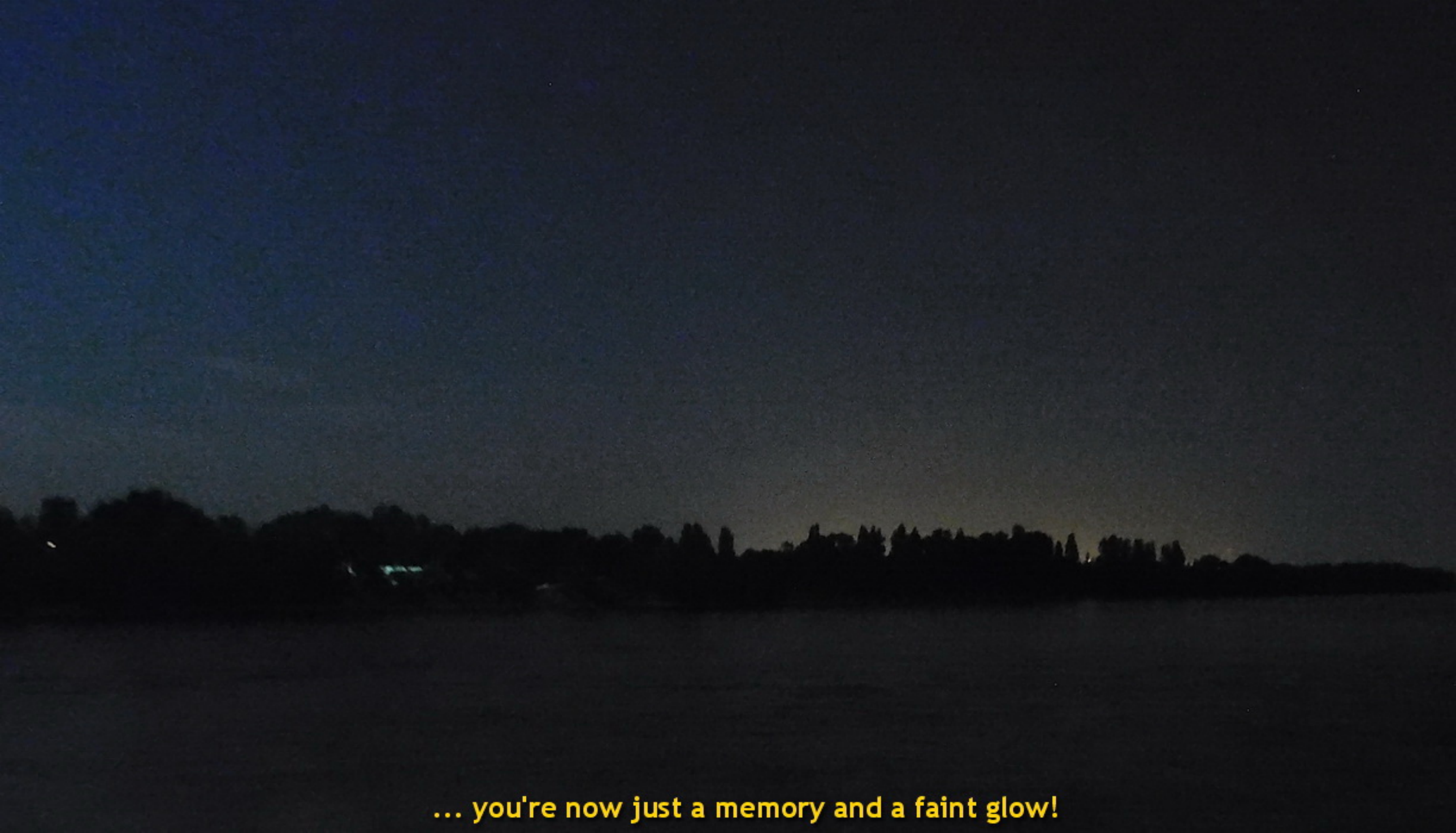
... and then sip Champagne on the Shuffleboard Deck and cruise the river night-life.

Liberty Statue at night.

(wrapped up against the night-time chills)

PICASSO

Bye, Budapest!


... you're now just a memory and a faint glow!

Disembark at Kalocsa -- not exactly a busy port -- and travel by bus

through cornfields

and sunflower fields.

Destination: Pécs (rhymes with “Mesh”), Hungary.
(It's a college town: note the McDonalds...)

Purpose of the excursion: the Cathedral

with nice paintings on the walls.

But the main attraction was out back, past the booths

(and past the rehearsal for the evening's holiday event,

... and feast...)

-- the main attraction was in the cellar:

A krisztogram | The Christogram | Christogramm

The UNESCO World Heritage site of Pécs

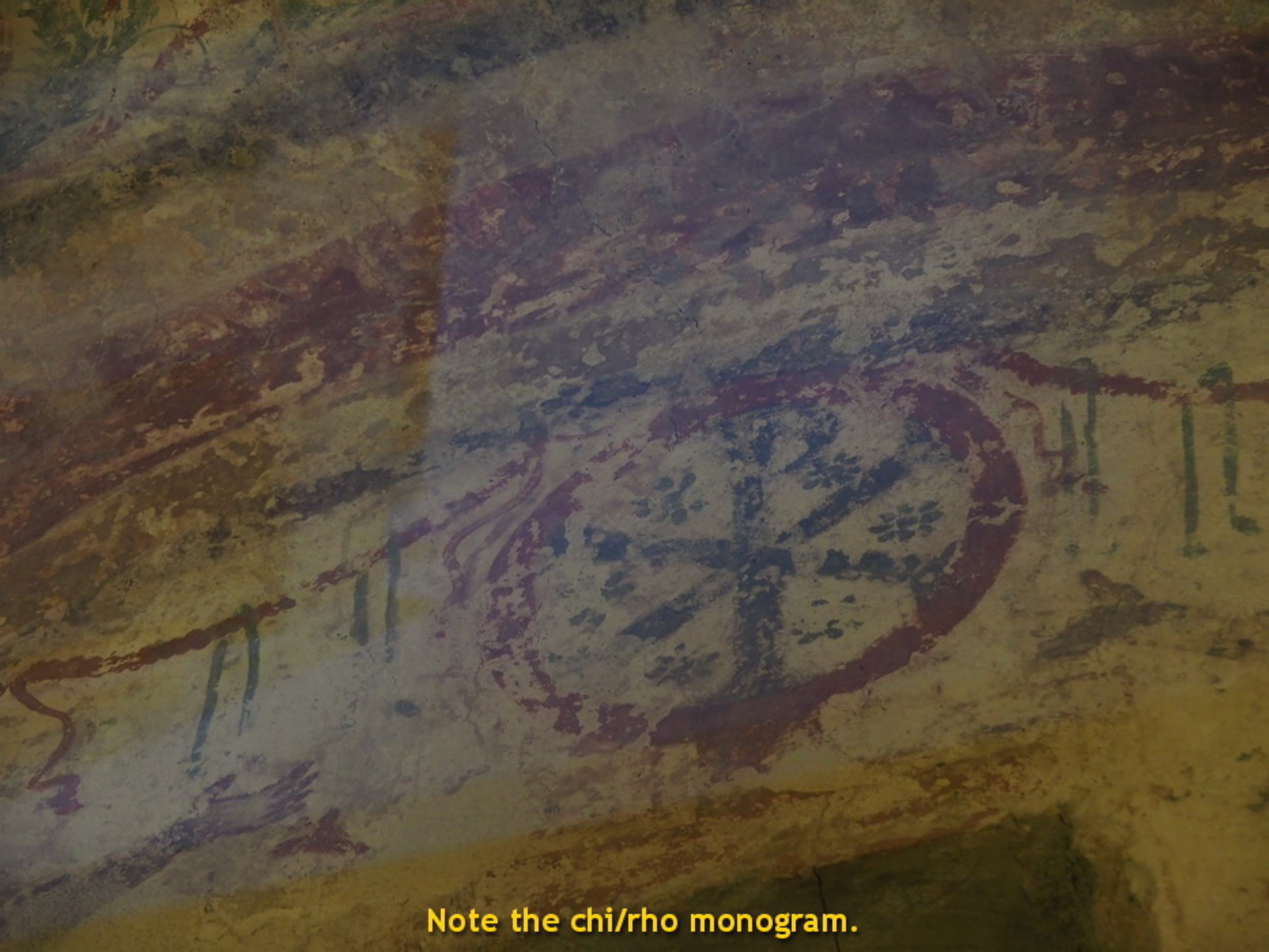
The World Heritage Convention concerning the protection of world cultural and natural heritage was adapted in 1972 and makes international co-operation possible so as to conserve and protect the universal cultural and natural legacy of the World. So far, 161 countries have joined the Convention, including Hungary in 1985.The Late Roman, partly Early Christian cemetery of Sopianae, the Roman predecessor of Pécs, was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2000. The burial chambers and memorial chapels of the Sopianae cemetery illustrate the unique early Christian sepulchral art and architecture of the northern and western Roman provinces of the Roman Empire in a versatile and complex way. The logo of the World Heritage site in Pécs is a bronze Christ monogram which was originally part of the suspension of an oil lamp. The pendant symbolising Christ is comprised of the Greek letters X (khi) and P (rho), the initial letters of Christ's Greek name (Khristos) thus called Christ monogram. On the item found in Pécs, the Greek letters A (alpha) and Ω (omega) symbolising the beginning and the end can also be seen.

some of the earliest Christian artifacts.

Descend catwalks to the catacombs...

... to a 4th Century burial chamber,

... with the original artwork intact.



Note the chi/rho monogram.

~1,600 - 1,700 years old.

Climb out of the crypt to find the more modern town of Pécs

The mosque of pasha Qasim the Victorious,
built by the Ottomans, converted into a church.

Note that the dome is topped
by both a crescent and a cross.

central Pécs

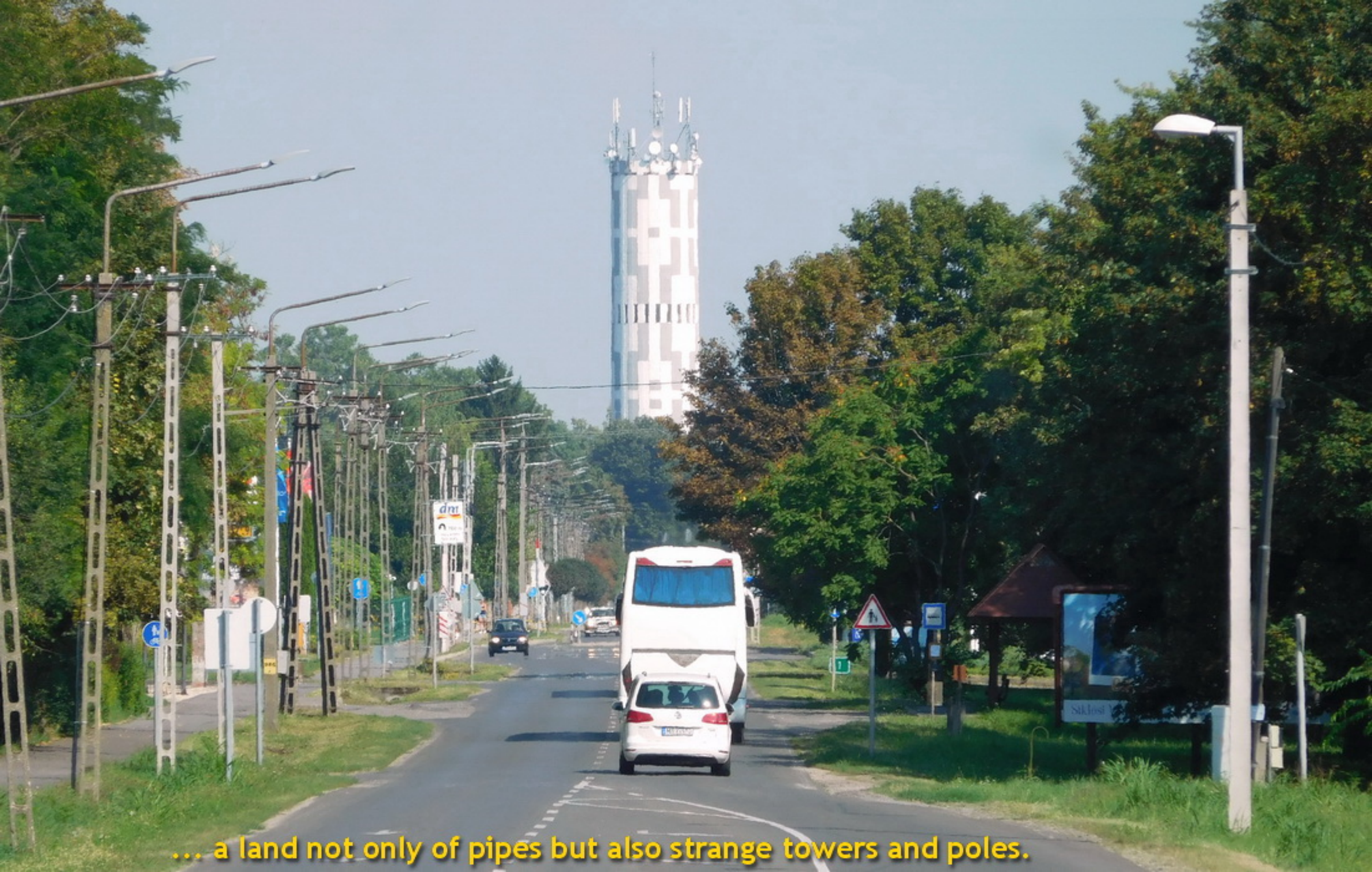
KORHELY
CAFEFREI

The group had lunch in wine cellar.

The Baranyavár ("Baranya Castle"), from the Middle Ages

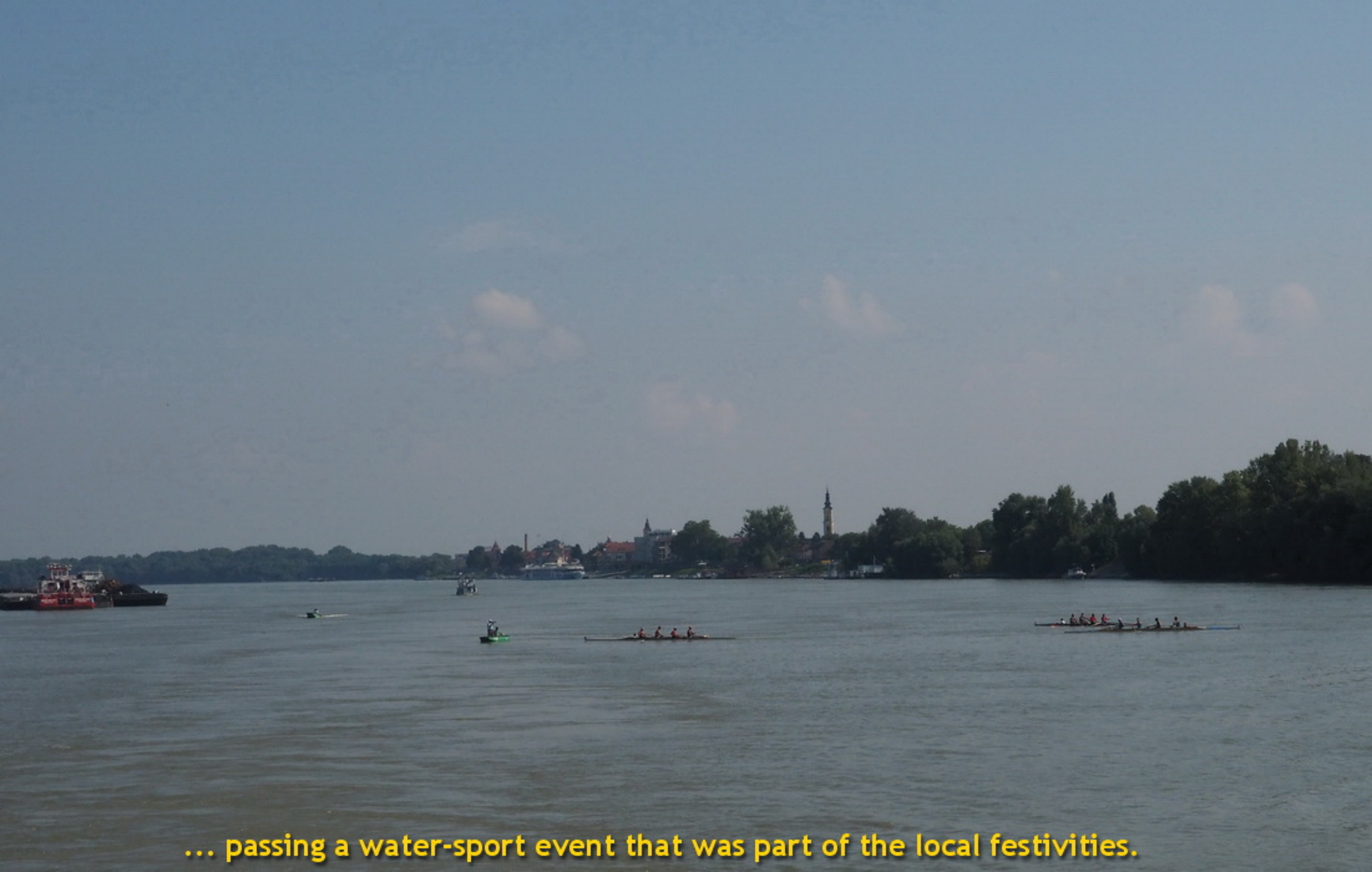
... and back to the buses and the present,

... with piping running everywhere. (Think of the movie, "Brazil")


... a land not only of pipes but also strange towers and poles.

At Mohács, we get back on the boat,

... and (after customs),
set sail for Serbia,



... passing a water-sport event that was part of the local festivities.

(And it was Pirate's Night on the boat, with the staff all going "arrg!")

Morning lecture: recent Serbian history, and trying to join modern Europe

At the end – “Modern Serbia” seen by a teenagers’ eyes

Well, I'm sorry to read sometimes a bad news about Serbia...

This is a beautiful country with good athletes! You know, everything is like in sport - When you practice a lot and when you try hard, the trophy always comes at the end!

... sorry 'bout the recent past; we're all better now... .

Tour the Belgrade Fortress.

Fortress wall.

The moat was filled in, and now is used as a tennis court,

... and for basketball.

The entrance tunnelway

... to a second moat (this one used for a military museum).

YOU RISK YOUR LIFE

A view from the fortress: the Ada Bridge

... and a Freedom Statue, sticking it to the Austrians (while mooning Serbia)

Also, a view of Soviet-era housing,

and the confluence of the Danube with the nearer Sava River.

In the distance, an old town,

... and a commercial district.

Serbia went through a bought of hyper-inflation.
(For a couple bucks, you could become a trillionaire!)

Explore the town...

some parts are nice and newly built.

ILIRIKA

A morning coffee-break at a fancy hotel,
beneath the portrait of Lenin.

НАРОДНИ МУЗЕЙ

(detail showing the support columns...)

They do have air-conditioning...

The Old Palace.

Freeway and bridges

A strange place for a billboard like this...

The Belgrade Underground -- under construction since ~1990...

A view of the Church of Saint Sava

the Church of Saint Sava

Inside the Church of Saint Sava, still under construction.

Head back into town for lunch:

Lunch: ćevapčići, fries, and a greek salad.

HOSTEL
CRÉDIT AGRICOLE
DOLCE & GELATO

House of the National Assembly of Serbia

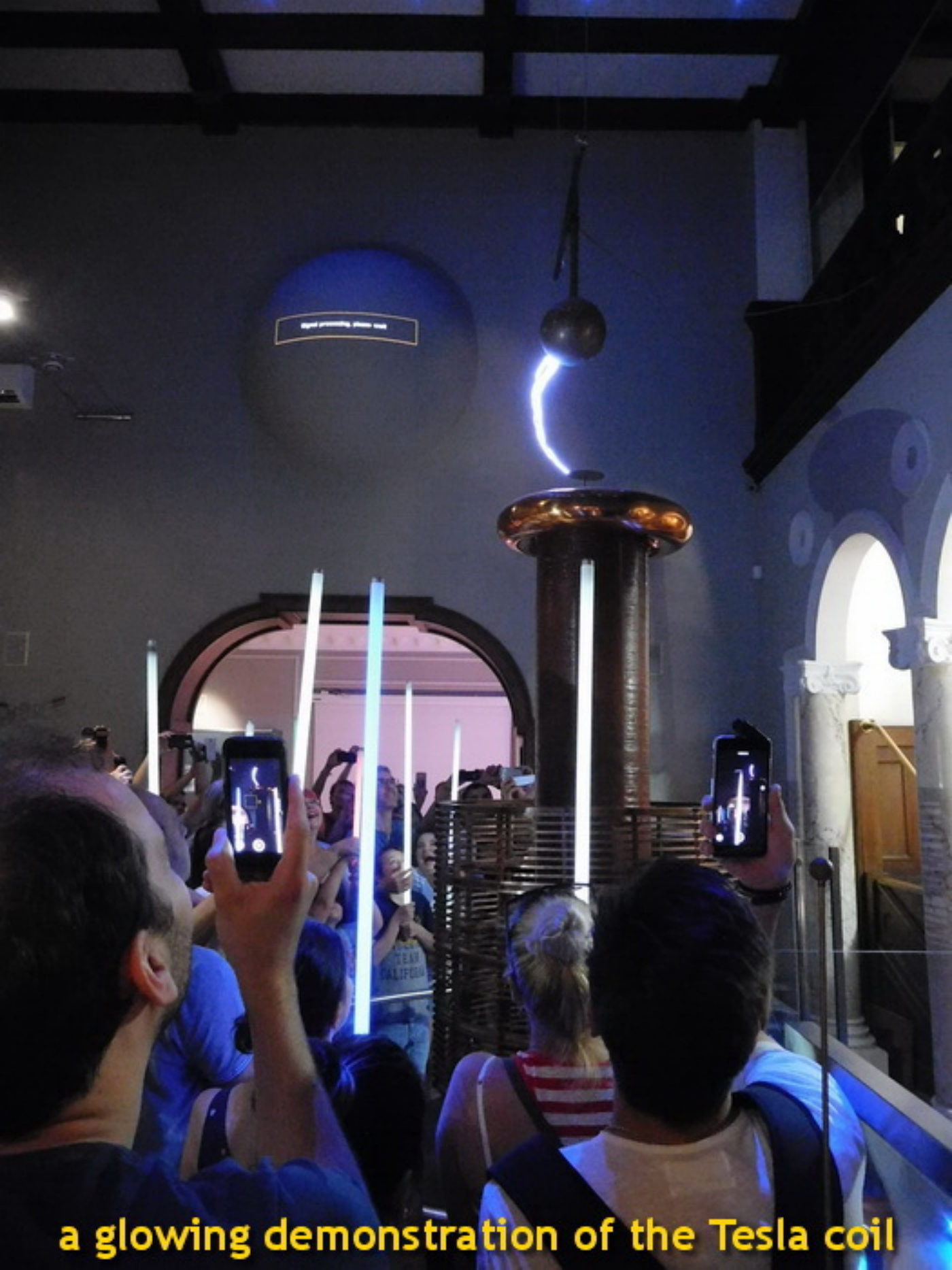
St. Mark's Church

apoteka
pharmacy
MENJAČNICA
EXCHANGE
BG 635 BN

serbia.com
KES
Vip Beach Ma
HE
NE
BG 271-YN

The Hotel Moscow (said to have great pastries...)

We go visit the Nikola Tesla Museum



a glowing demonstration of the Tesla coil

one of Nikola Tesla's suits

The sphere containing Nikola Tesla's ashes.

We walk back to the boat, and face park-goers going home.

... and a group doing Ukrainian folk dance.

Back on the river at night,

... where we're treated to music and folk-dance on the top-deck.

... and then we drift out of Belgrade and on to the next destination.

Next morning: all on-deck for "the Iron Gate" --
the Danube's gorge through the Carpathian Mountains

Float past Romanian villages

Mănăstirea Mraconia, "the Underwater Monastery": originally built in 1523,
attacked by the Ottomans, rebuilt, flooded by the Soviets, & now rebuilt again in 1993-2000.

Decebalus, last king of Dacia, who fought against the Roman emperors Domitian & Trajan.
(The sculpture was carved 1994 - 2004.)

A (relocated) marker by Roman Emperor Trajan,
marking the largest bridge in the Empire, built in 103–105 AD.

the hillside road, over which we soon will travel...

Approaching a lock on the Danube.

JRC
I'm getting a sinking feeling about this...

We're down, and the exit is opening...

Cleared to go (so long as we can clear the bridge...)

The lock & dam complex also provides hydro-electric power to the region.

Goulash Communism, and Other Recipes

- Slavenka Drakulić, *A Guided Tour Through the History of Communism*
- Ms. Piggy (not Miss), political scientist and author of best-selling cookbook
- "I would argue that politics is—cooking."
- "There was no goulash in the gulag—and there was no gulag in goulash communism."
- What was goulash communism, how did it work, and was it successful?

Morning lecture: consumerism in the different communist countries.

Explore Romania! Get off at a town smaller than its name, ...

... get on the buses, ...

... take the -scenic- route, ...

... to reach the town of Orșova.

(At least they have a bank....)

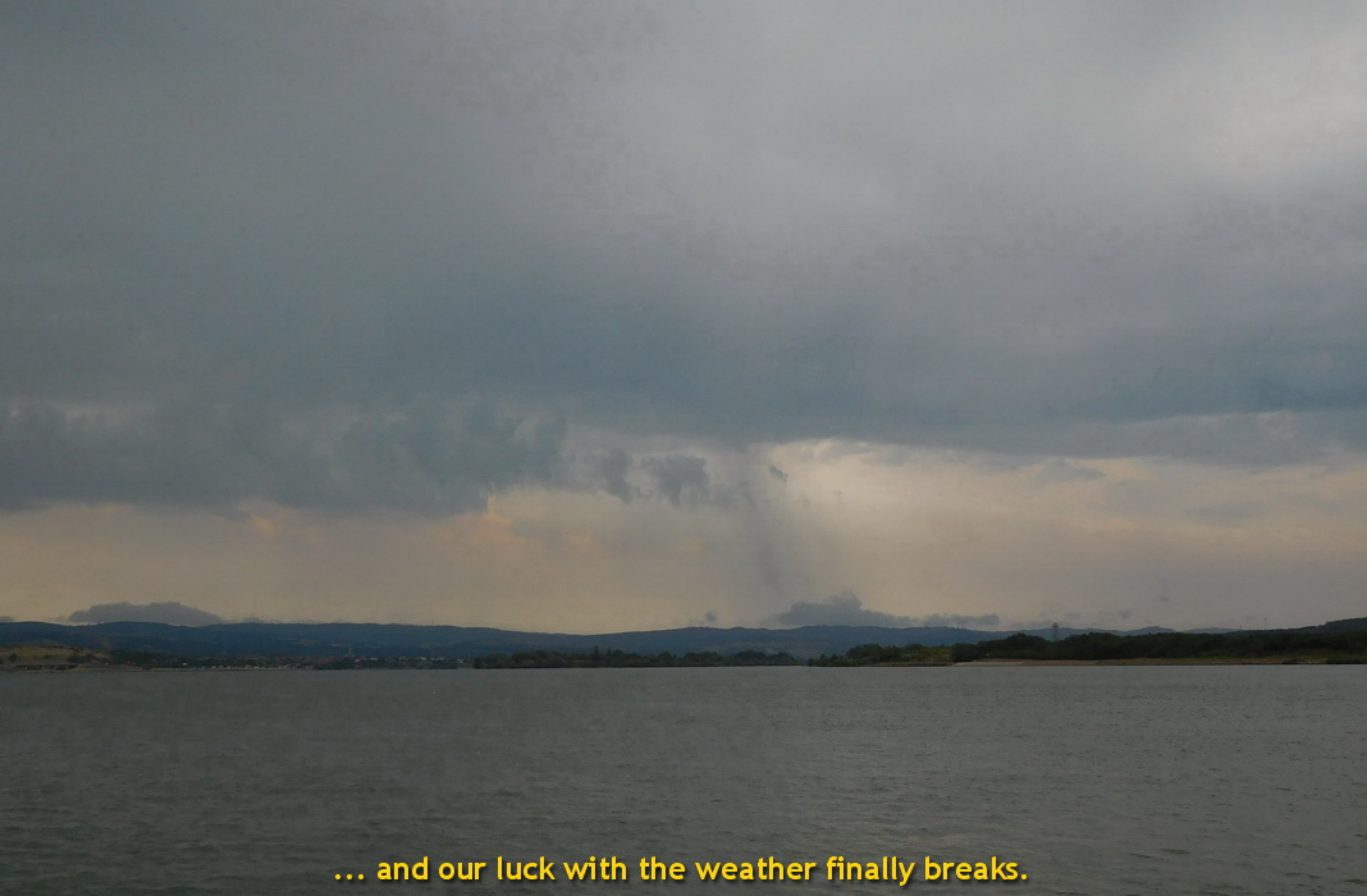
We came to see the only church
built by the communists.
(It replaced one flooded by the dam...)

Sparse, but with an interesting
tent-like shape and cross-shaped skylight.

And simple artwork, but containing images of both Vladimir Lenin and John Lennon.

(And we were given an organ concert.)

A roadside icon...


... and our luck with the weather finally breaks.

We grab umbrellas and head out to explore the town on our own...

A statue of Roman Emperor Trajan,

... and a monument to the bridge he had built here around 100 AD.

the Drobeta Episcopal Cathedral

The "Water Castle" (built 1914)

The Theater,

... with nice griffin.

A street market

Str. Ratiomir
Bd. Carol I

A typical street...

(does the wiring look up to code?)

Universal Net
partener Orange
A.T.V.

The medieval fortress of Severin (1233) [In better repair than parts of the town?]

An artesian well, which has better tasting water than the municipal tap water.

And back on the boat for one last trip.

Get off the boat for the last time, leave the Danube, to go to Vidin, Bulgaria.

Tour the Sveti Nikolay (St Nicholas) Church

the Sveti Nikolay Church

(with nice chandeliers)

Next door: the medieval church.
the Ottomans allowed them, but only if lower than the garden walls.

inside the medieval church.

Get in the buses and tour Vidin.

The mosque of Osman Pazvantoğlu (~1800)

inside the library of Osman Pazvantoglu

the Vidin Synagogue
(deserted after Jewish emigration to Israel)

the moat and walls of the medieval Vidin fortress, Baba Vida

The medieval Vidin fortress, Baba Vida

Now head south to Sofia, crossing fields of sunflowers,

... and woods and hills,

... through small towns,

... and past rock formations reminiscent of Arizona.

Stop for lunch at a place called "The Rocks",

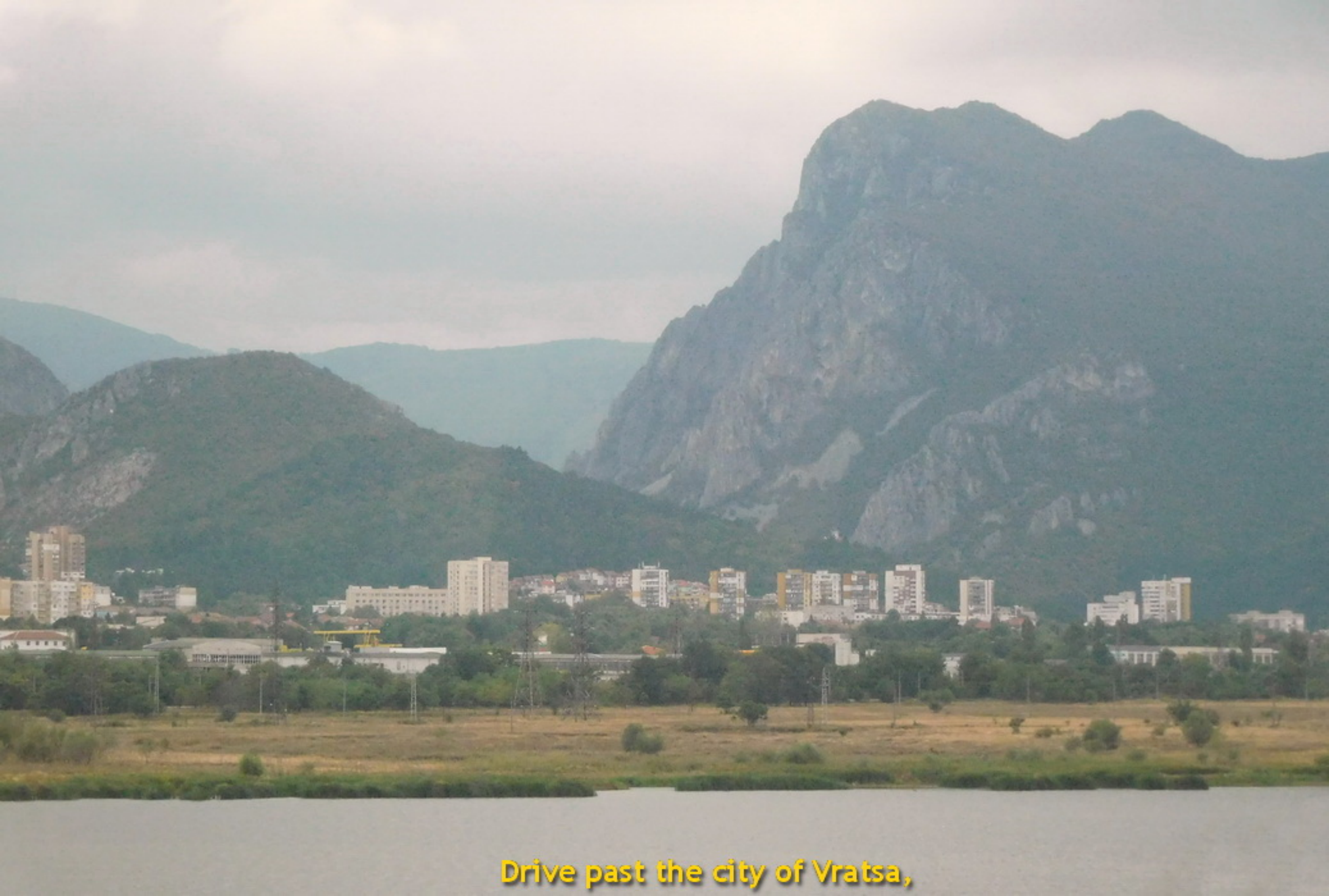
... and then continue the ride south.

Crossing through the Stara Planina -- the Balkan Mountains.

(with flat plains off to the other side of the road...)

The Balkan Mountain.

A quick coffee-break stop (at the shop next door)



Drive past the city of Vratsa,

... an industrial town,

... and on towards Sofia.

The outskirts of Sofia.

(some buildings look more inviting than others...)

Sofia is not built on a river -- this is about it.

We stay at the Sofia Hotel Balkan,
at the center of town

Our room, with a balcony,

... which directly overlooks an archeological dig of ancient Roman ruins...

(we could even watch them work!)

Some of the finds are over 2,000 years old.

Views from our window

Banya Bashi Mosque

Cathedral Church Sveta Nedelya

Note the statue of Sofia:

A close-up of Sofia, the goddess of wisdom (and so she has a wise owl).

We were right on the pedestrian mall -- Blvd. Vitosha

a (broken) communist monument

capitalism seems to have come out on top...

... you can even get a "Big Mac McMenu" here.

... although we opted for a beer
at a cool sidewalk cafe.

Go for one last guided-tour walk,

... and see monuments

... and buildings.

(You can just "follow the yellow brick road"!)

St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral,
one of the largest Eastern Orthodox cathedrals in the world.

АРХЕОЛОГИЧЕСКИ МУЗЕЙ

Sofia does not have a stray-dog "problem".
Instead, they catch them, spay/neuter them, treat them, socialize them,
and then release them back into the community for all to enjoy.

A "Village Dog" enjoying being enjoyed.

Bulgaria's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

A diagram of the ancient city under the modern city.

... it's part of the subway station.

At the home of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria

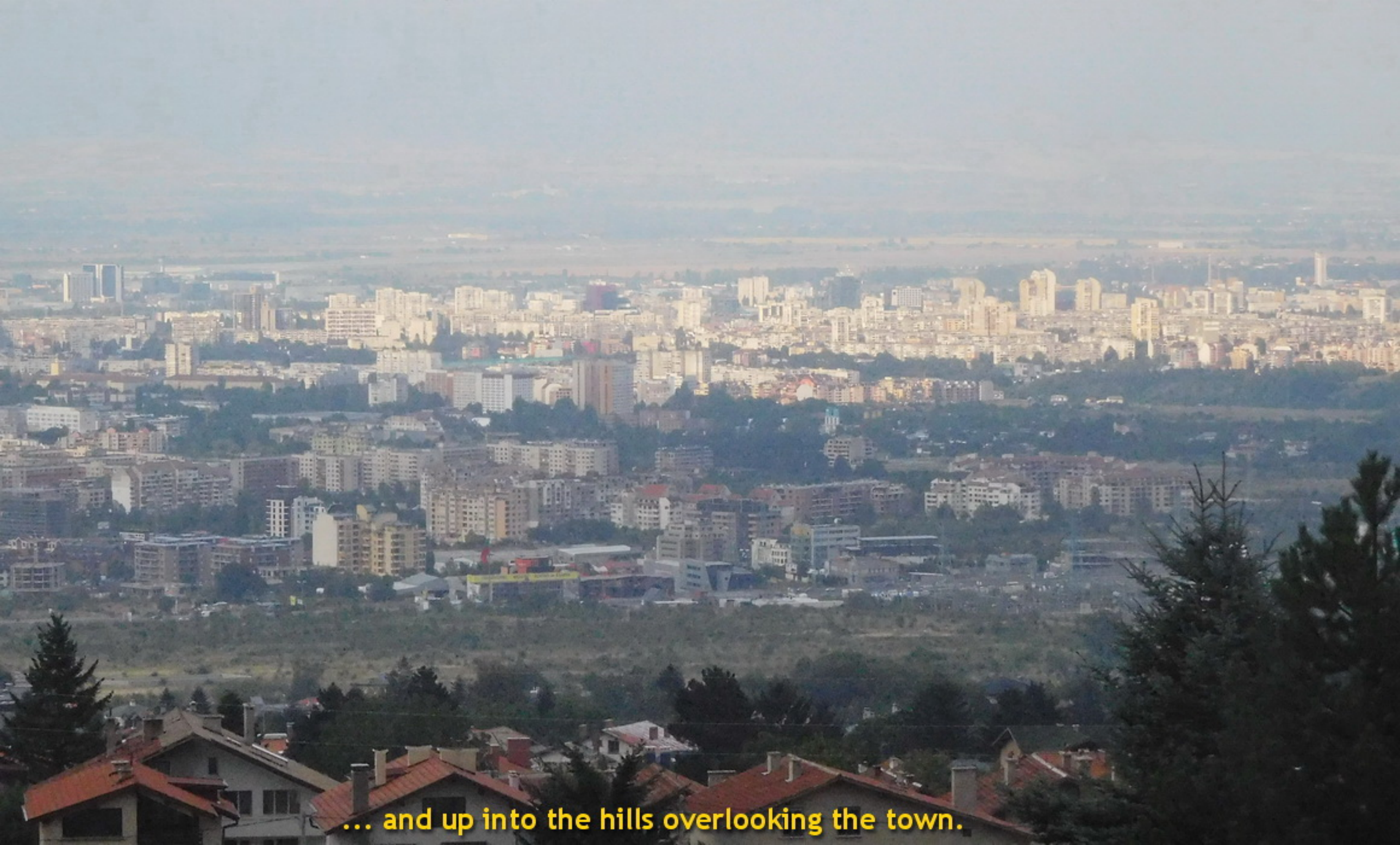
Changing of the guards: a fresh squad marches in, members swap,

... and then the relieved guards march away.

Liv listens in on a stirring conversation.

The tour-group is bused to the nearby mountains for one last dinner.

We drive past some of the newer developments,



... and up into the hills overlooking the town.

For the farewell dinner toast.

hors d'oeuvres for 140+

folk music,

folk dancing,

... and fire-walking.

Then get on the buses

and head for the airport -- the trip is over. Bye!