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## British Isles, a cruise trip

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Summer in the city ? No, on a cruise ship and going north !  
 A new destination and an experience for us. Starting point Hamburg.  
 Being a person who worries too much, we did fly a day early to avoid any possible problem like airline-strike, weather hazard etc.  
 A good choice as it made us stay in the Vier Jahreszeiten Hotel at the shore of the Innenalster. Beautiful view and great weather, sunny but not hot and just a few steps away from the street cafes.  
 Sunday, everybody is outdoors enjoying the sun, the food, the drinks and we trying very hard to integrate!  
 Monday afternoon, our check-in time for the cruise, the ship was anchored in the Hafencity, with max. 650 passengers, not too huge and crowded.

Welcome to our home for the next 14 days, with a drink in our hands, cheers.  
 Unfortunately the cruise commences after 18h and means we are sound asleep when we pass the end of the river Elbe and the estuary at midnight.  
 First day we just see north-sea water around us, our first stop after 24h at sea, Edinburgh. The old city is busy with students, tourists and festivals, so it seems. Gosh, I am trying to imagine how it looks like during calmer times.  
 The sightseeing tour provides just a glimpse of history and present. We decide to disappear into the crowd. Get a feel for the High Street ( Royal Mile ) and its performers.  
 In the evening the Military Tattoo is our program, not sure what to expect. Edinburgh Castle is situated above the city on a rock. The arena is just in front of it, 6500 seats for the audience. Our seats, high up on the side opposite the musician entrance, are great. Excellent view and sound. The Tattoo is very international, China, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Mongolia and many more. Just amazing and far away from military music!  
 The next day we have to try another famous 'thing' from Scotland, whisky. Sorry to say still not a fan of it.

Invergordon and Inverness are waiting for us. The east coast has cliffs and long, deep bays, called Firth. This generates a tongue twister as one of the biggest is called, Firth of Forth. All surrounded by the highlands and its sparse nature. Beautiful in August as the heath is blooming. We visit the Dunrobin Castle and have blue sky, what else should we want ?  
 The ship is on its way to the Orkney Islands and we reach Kirkwall in the morning. The archipelago has 90 islands but only 28 are inhabited. The coastline is steep and rugged. We are brave and join a walking group along the cliffs. Superb views, some fences to climb and the wind to tame. Just during the last 30minutes it starts to rain, no way to stay dry. Finally we reach the house and get a cup of tea, now it would be the right time for whisky to stay warm. Its getting cold with the wet jeans and we all are happy to return to the ship. Adventure pure and hopefully no sneezing.  
 The captain says we will have a strong wind and should secure the loose items in our cabin, great, I don't want to be seasick ! I decide to take some pills and go to bed early before the storm is coming. I put this theory into practice and what happen ? Nothing, no storm, just a tiny bit rocky. All for nothing.



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Next the Isle of Skye, Portree as harbour and the great highlands as background. Not only has this been an important place in the past, Bonnie Prince Charlie, Flora, the McLeod's but also a site for Hollywood movies. It is almost that one can see the Highlander, James Bond (Skyfall) and Elizabeth walking along the Eilean Donan castle. Gives me a shiver so much history and fantasy in one place.

Back to the ship and off to the Isle of Man, belongs to the British crown but has its own law, tax, postage, money. Douglas as Capital is a tiny, quiet town but the island has changing landscapes and flora, worth a trip and not only at TT race time. On our sightseeing tour we have grey sky and a drizzle of rain, too bad that we there is no more time to see the island. Now we are in Dublin and the sun is shining. Great to get around and see what has changed after all this years away. More cars, more people, more tourists and more noise, so it seems. Some well known places are still there and have not changed, The Shelbourne Hotel at St. Stephan's Green, we have Oysters with Guinness in the bar, just like old times. Grafton Street with the street musicians, Brown Thomas Department store and numerous Restaurants, Cafes and Bar leading into Temple Bar. Dublin says Welcome back to us. Great also the new buildings and art objects along the Liffey. The day is passing quickly and the ship is sailing to the next stop, Dunmore East, Waterfront, unfortunately the weather decides differently and our tenders are unable to get on shore.

A few hours of waiting if the condition will improve, no way, result we continue to Falmouth. The town is famous for its harbour; it forms the third deepest natural harbour in the world. Historically packet ships carrying letters from around the world used to sail in and out of the port between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Our excursion gets us to the Eden Project. A working china clay pit until 1995, the iconic biomes first opened to the public in 2001 and it became an instant success. This project is an impressive transformation of the old pit. It is an educational charity and social enterprise, creates gardens, events and exhibitions. There are two biomes, a Mediterranean and a rainforest biome, which is large enough to fit the Tower of London inside. They are home to approximately one million plants.

We have an additional stop, the Isle of Wight. The town Cowes is touristy and has lots of little shops, cafes and bars, nice to take a stroll, especially if the weather is pleasant. It is a good place to buy the souvenirs.

Our last stop is Dover, the weather is awful and the town not very appealing but we are brave and despite of rain and wind we get on shore and walk along the highstreet, to the harbour and back, getting wet and cold. Reason to visit 2 or 3 cafes to warm up and hopefully they will have wifi for us and our emails. Not a lot of luck neither with the weather nor the wifi. Lets go back to the ship and say good bye to Great Britain. The last day we are at sea and the weather is laughing at us, blue sky and sunshine. The brunch is Bavarian style, beer and beer and beer, sausages, pork knuckles, pretzels..... everybody is on deck. Great last day. During the night we are sailing up the river Elbe back to Hamburg where we arrive at 7am. Again beautiful sunny weather but it is time to get ready for the airport and take the flight back home.

Travel Treasures

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