

Travel Tales

Cruising Through the Pastries of Europe

by

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My wife and I just sailed on Viking River Cruises' luxury vessel *Viking Danube*, on a terrific 15-day voyage across Europe, from Budapest to Amsterdam, on the Danube, Main and Rhine Rivers. (See Viking River Cruises, www.vikingrivercruises.com; 800-304-9616; 5700 Canoga Ave., #200, Woodland Hills, CA 91367.) To add to the many pleasures of the destinations and the ship, we decided to systematically sample the pastry shops and cafes in the ports ashore. Ah, the sacrifices I make for my readers!

Our methodology was to ask the ship's guides or local residents for the best pastry shop in town, and go there and try to purchase the best looking pastry that most resembled the standard "Napoleon" pastry found in many US bakeries. (This usually has a pastry crême filling, with top, middle and bottom of flaky, thin pie dough, and a vanilla top with wavy chocolate swirls, and is about 3 inches high and 2x5 inches wide.) We rated the pastries on the familiar "high school" scale of A, B, C, D, F, with a special grade of "Oh My God!" for something so outstanding that we would remember it for decades. (In rating the many restaurants we visit, we only give an OMG! every year or two.)

The summary findings of this important scientific expedition are as follows:

- Surprisingly few bakeries in Europe have Napoleons. Only in Holland could we find exact matches. In one German town the "Hollander kirsch" was very similar.
- The best pastry was at the Kaffee Mayer in Bratislava, Slovakia. This was a huge surprise, because we expected Vienna and other famous centers to be better, and because Bratislava on our last visit in the early 1990s was a run-down town with poor food. All that is changed. The Old Town is spruced up, and has marvelous art, shopping and museums. This terrific café, with great history and atmosphere, is located on the main square of the town, and is definitely a destination in itself. Amazingly, the pastry we sampled at Kaffee Mayer was priced very reasonably in comparison with most others.
- Price had little relation to quality. Some of the most expensive pastries were rated the lowest. And there was a very wide variety of quality.
- Many European pastries have much less sugar and sweetness, compared to US versions.

Our detailed results are presented in the table below.

Shop/Address/Town	Item Sampled	Cost in USD	Rating	Comments
Gerbeaud's Vorosmarty Sq. Budapest, Hungary	Crème cake	\$4.00	D	Famous shop, nice atmosphere, but a disappointing, cakey result
Kaffee Mayer Hlavne Namestie 4 (main square) Bratislava, Slovakia	Krenovy rez (crème cake)	\$2.75	OMG (Oh My God!)	Fantastic, light crème, with a chocolate top. Worth driving or sailing 300 miles for!
Aida 2301 Gross-Enzersdorf, Eurostrasse Vienna, Austria	Crementite (crème cake)	\$4.00	A-	Excellent pastry creme; located beside St. Stephen's Cathedral and in 22 other locations around the city
Haubi's Hauptstrasse (Main Sq.) Melk, Austria	Crème cake	\$3.00	B+	Heavy crème, brandy taste
Confiserie Simon Am Rindermarkt 10 Passau, Germany	Mandel Bienenshich (almond crème cake)	\$2.80	C	Cakey, almond-topped
Provenza Hauptmarkt 6-8 (Main Sq.) Nuremburg, Germany	Bienestich (almond crème cake)	\$3.30	B+	Cakey, almond-topped
Café am Dom Ringleinsgasse 2 Bamberg, Germany	Mandelhorne (almond pastry)	\$1.90	A-	Very good, C-shaped pastry, stuffed with marzipan
Am Markt Marktplatz 10 Wertheim, Germany	Schneeball	\$2.50	B+	Delicate pastry, best of the area's Schneeballs
	Mendelhornechen	\$2.10	B+	C-shaped, stuffed with lots of sticky marzipan
Dom Café Markt 12-16 (Main Sq.) Mainz, Germany	Hollander kirsch	\$3.60	A	Excellent pastry crème with cherry bottom and puff pastry top
Café Reichard Unter Fettenhennen 11 Cologne, Germany	Appelwein crème (crème cake)	\$4.83	C	Bland, gelatinous
Bakkerij Berens Snoekjessteeg 1-5 Amsterdam, Holland	Tompouce (Napoleon)	\$2.59	B	A bit gelatinous; near Rembrant's House
Croissanterie Jennifer Hekelveld 3 Amsterdam, Holland	Tampoch (Napoleon)	\$2.80	B-	Marshmallow texture; near main train station

Upon returning to Maryland, we naturally had to re-try our favorite local bakery, Stella's, at 11510 Rockville Pike, facing south behind the FedEx/Kinko's (telephone: 301-231-

9026). Stella has fantastic fruit tarts, cakes, candies and almond cookies. We rated her \$3.00 Napoleons as a solid “A,” right up there with the best pastries in Europe!

Now I have to go downstairs and ride my stationary bicycle, to work off all those new pounds. Keep traveling—and eating!