VOYAGER VIGNETTES
Crusing the Baltic

We were still unpacking when, like Jeeves, an immaculately attired man sort of shimmered into the cabin and introduced himself as Arnel, our butler for the duration of the cruise. Though quite familiar with cruise amenities, we were duly impressed. Not bad. This was obviously a very high-end ship. In addition to a walk-in closet and a private balcony, we now had our very own butler. (Continued on page 41)
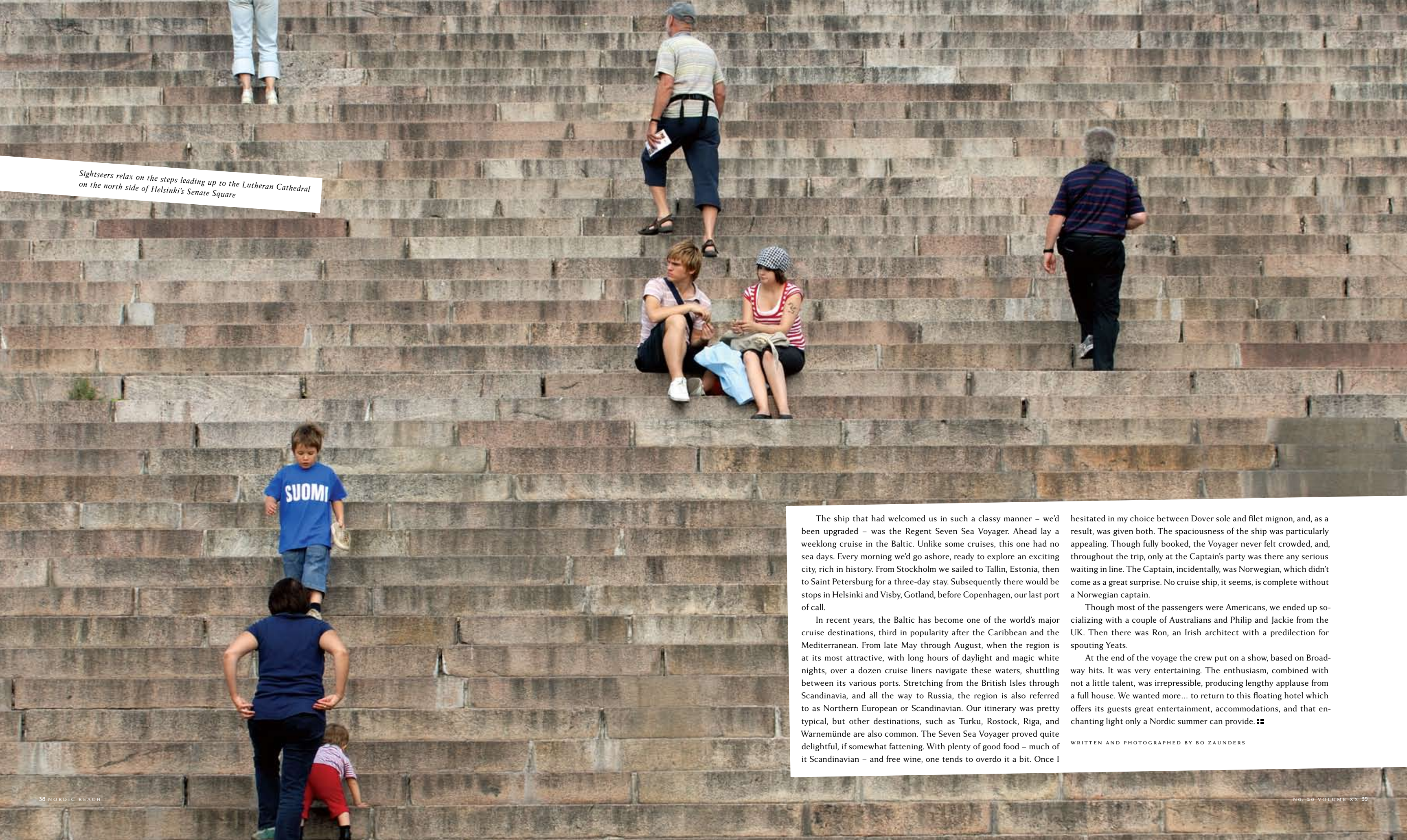
Along with the Hermitage, The Church of Our Savior of Spilled Blood is one of the must-see landmarks in Saint Petersburg. Built on the spot where the Emperor Alexander was assassinated in 1881, it was designed in the spirit of 16th-17th century Russian architecture, and boasts an interior (now a museum) no less spectacular than its ornate, domed exterior.

A Russian nesting doll, or Martyoshka, usually looks like a young woman dressed in Russian native costume with a scarf on her head. But, as in this marketplace near the Nevsky Prospect ~ the 5th Avenue of St. Petersburg ~ it can metamorphosize into practically any big-name political or fictional figure, even a Public Enemy #1.

(Clockwise from top left) Few things bring out the magic of Scandinavian summer like the Stockholm archipelago, with its thousands of small islands and white ferries gliding back and forth; In summery Visby, everything reverts to a medieval past. These Gotland girls take a break in the town center. And nearby, within the ancient city walls, is a bustling marketplace, complete with jousting tournaments, traditional music, and handicrafts (opposite page); Nyhavn (literally "New Harbor") is lined with small bars and restaurants facing a picturesque assembly of fishing, sail, and tour boats. It's Copenhagen's popular hangout where residents and tourists alike enjoy the sunshine, the crowds and, mostly likely, a Danish beer; Pure, white, and Neo-Classical, the Lutheran Cathedral dominates the north side of Helsinki's Senate Square. For a welcome break, sightseers sit down on the steps below.

The ship that had welcomed us in such a classy manner – we'd been upgraded – was the Regent Seven Sea Voyager. Ahead lay a weeklong cruise in the Baltic. Unlike some cruises, this one had no sea days. Every morning we'd go ashore, ready to explore an exciting city, rich in history. From Stockholm we sailed to Tallin, Estonia, then to Saint Petersburg for a three-day stay. Subsequently there would be stops in Helsinki and Visby, Gotland, before Copenhagen, our last port of call.

In recent years, the Baltic has become one of the world's major cruise destinations, third in popularity after the Caribbean and the Mediterranean. From late May through August, when the region is at its most attractive, with long hours of daylight and magic white nights, over a dozen cruise liners navigate these waters, shuttling between its various ports. Stretching from the British Isles through Scandinavia, and all the way to Russia, the region is also referred to as Northern European or Scandinavian. Our itinerary was pretty typical, but other destinations, such as Turku, Rostock, Riga, and Warnemünde are also common. The Seven Sea Voyager proved quite delightful, if somewhat fattening. With plenty of good food – much of it Scandinavian – and free wine, one tends to overdo it a bit. Once I

hesitated in my choice between Dover sole and filet mignon, and, as a result, was given both. The spaciousness of the ship was particularly appealing. Though fully booked, the Voyager never felt crowded, and, throughout the trip, only at the Captain's party was there any serious waiting in line. The Captain, incidentally, was Norwegian, which didn't come as a great surprise. No cruise ship, it seems, is complete without a Norwegian captain.

Though most of the passengers were Americans, we ended up socializing with a couple of Australians and Philip and Jackie from the UK. Then there was Ron, an Irish architect with a predilection for spouting Yeats.

At the end of the voyage the crew put on a show, based on Broadway hits. It was very entertaining. The enthusiasm, combined with not a little talent, was irrepressible, producing lengthy applause from a full house. We wanted more... to return to this floating hotel which offers its guests great entertainment, accommodations, and that enchanting light only a Nordic summer can provide. ‡

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