ROMANIA

Peles Castle

We have seen our fair share of castles in Europe over the years. Peles is one of the more modern ones we have visited. Nestled at the foot of the Bucegi Mountains in the picturesque town of Sinaia, Peles Castle is a supposedly a masterpiece of German Neo-Renaissance architecture, considered by many as one of the most stunning castles in Europe. Built over a period of 40 years (completed in 1914) it is both beautiful on the outside and extremely opulent and very stylish inside. The many rooms reflect a bewildering array of different architectural styles. I guess when you have money to burn you can build a castle like Peles. We were told by our guide that the monarch, King Carol 1, built the castle "with his own money" (because he was exceedingly rich). He finished it in 1883. It certainly shows what a wealthy man can do. After 1883 there were many tinkerers who "added and amplified" the castle to what you see today. It is indeed a very beautiful building when standing outside and the inside is also very stunning.

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FASHION STATEMENT? Everyone had to wear these in Peles Castle. So funny to see everyone looking like dorks, shuffling around polishing floors.

STAND BACK We waited for the volcanic explosion but it never came. When something did happen it was a every mild - just one bubble.

TIME TIME TIME When you are a queen and have time on your hands what do you do? Learn 9 languages and write 47 books. What a life!!!

From chalk to cheese …….

We arrived in Sinaia early and headed up the side of the steep mountain. Near the end we were ushered into a parking location with buses all around us. The walk to the castle was very short and we luckily arrived just as the English tour was starting. You can only visit the inside of the castle with a guide.

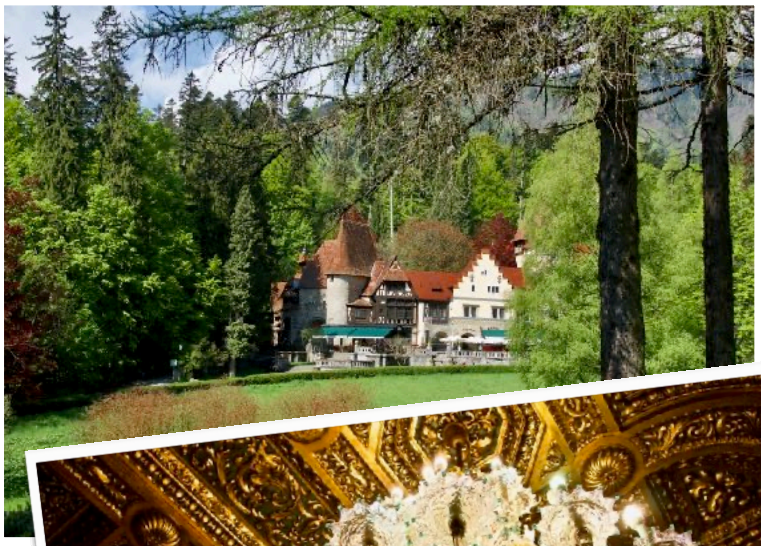
Our guide was at pains to tell us of the castle's many features including the application of 47 different types of wood on the ceilings, doors and walls; the widespread use made of a vast array of marble and precious stone, myriads of stained glass windows; and a unique range of silk and exotic tapestries. There were paintings by all the celebrity artists of that era. Peles was the first castle in Europe to have electricity with elevator, central heating with ducted air and even a central vacuuming system.

We were then ushered around the first floor rooms. The tour was short - only 30mins. We would have liked more but only realised later that we could have also visited the upper floors if we had purchased another ticket. Given that we had had our fill we went back to the van and drove out with the parking organiser chasing after us. We did not understand what he wanted till we were well down the road when I spied a piece of paper sticking out the side of the side window (which fell off before we could stop). Maybe a fine might follow us back to Martin, the van's owner. We laughed because we could not work out what all the fuss was about but I guess parking is a problem here.

After a quick lunch and relax in the van Heather read up some more about the Danube River delta (where the river meets the Black Sea). Our original plan was to head south to Bulgaria from Peles but we calculated we still had ample time left so instead I pointed the van east towards an area known for the "largest refuge for wild birds in all of Europe."

We are currently overnighting midway in a very isolated caravan park next to a volcano. Yes, a volcano, a muddy one. We parked and because there was lots of daylight left we went on a 15min walk up to the "bubbling cauldron". The path was muddy and slippery and, much to Heather's chagrin, it was quite steep in parts. When we finally reached the top we were both even more annoyed. Bummer!! We'd left our bloody wallets in the van! It meant our exercise regime needed to be extended. Back down to the van for our money and return. When we finally got back up to the "mud volcano(s)" for the second time it was a bit of a letdown. Very little "boil" and hardly any "bubble" - just lots of dry mud and a couple of wet spots. An early night tonight

PHOTOS



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