

Europe 2012 with Ian



Tuesday April 3

Arrive SeaTac 1:30 pm for 4:30 flight. Iceland Air flight to Paris via Reykjavik. At the gate they told us the max weight for any overhead carryons was 6 kilos.

I was flabbergasted, as this seemed ridiculously low. I'm trying to be more Buddha-like, no matter what happens, and I mostly succeeded in staying pleasant, but said, nevertheless "you're kidding!" In the end we walked on with our bags & no one said anything.

The flight was uneventful (the best kind). I slept for about an hour. Arrived in Reykjavik about 6:30 am local (11:30 pm our time). Went through "customs" which was never called customs.



I was tired but Ian was wide awake. The airport was quiet, small, & empty. Seamlessly boarded our next flight to Paris. (Exit row seats on both flights.) 3 hour flight & I slept the whole way.

Arrive Charles de Gaulle airport 1 pm. Were surprised there was no customs to go through. ~~At~~ In Reykjavik we had never even ^{been} asked any questions.

Easily found the train to Gif. En route we texted the Michals to let them know we were on the train. We arrived in Gif & they weren't waiting. We called & they had never received our text. They live close & picked us up in minutes. The weather was cool & overcast.

We were eager to stretch our legs so Genevieve took us for a nice walk

around Gif. We saw a chocolate shop w/ not only bunnies & eggs, but cats, fish, & musical instruments made of chocolate. They gave us a sample - delicious!

We saw pheasants in the wetland. We stopped to visit Genevieve's niece, who lives in new "ecological" house in Gif. She graciously gave us a tour. The house has no central heating system. They have a wood stove & one small radiator as backup.

After our walk we had a snack of orange juice & fruitcake. We're speaking a mix of English & French, as Genevieve's English is limited & Ian doesn't speak French. It's tiring for everyone, but worth it of course.

Ian & I took short naps, then had a dinner of cantalope followed by "veau blanchette", veal in gravy

Big construction project in center of Gif. 3 to 4 story residential commercial. Genevieve is glad because she says there aren't enough shops to support the 10 K people who live in the valley.



with rice. It was delicious, although the meat was hard to chew. Then a plate of cheeses. Some were delicious & some were really strong! Then an apple tart with their homegrown apples. Then Ian took a shower & I did email, & we both crashed. I was awoken at 2 am by a noise that sounded like a pile driver. ~~I wondered if~~ Then went back to sleep. Slept from 9:30-7:30 & woke up on local time. ~~Had coffee!~~

Thurs April 5

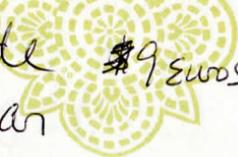
Had a light breakfast. Emmanuel drove us to station about 9. Train stopped halfway to Paris & said everyone must get off for some reason. Luckily trains ~~are~~ run every 2 minutes at that spot.

Arrived Arc de Triomphe around 10, hiked to top. Cold today, ~~but~~



about 45°, and foggy. Eiffel Tower like a ghost in the distance. Walked down Champs-Elysée to Tuileries. Running late for lunch at Karen & Steve's. Forgot to write down metro stop. Thought it was Pont Marie. No one there had heard of street. Tried to call, couldn't get call to go through. Tried to use public ^{pay} phone - too confusing. Finally tried calling without country code - it worked. This could explain why our texts to Michals didn't go thru.

Karen & Steve renting a tiny "mezzanine" (loft+) apt. for a month. Nice neighborhood, courtyard of building. Lunch of quiche, salad niçoise, bread, pastries. A too quick visit, but so fun to finally rendezvous with Karen in Paris.

Metro to Opera, went inside  for first time. Very opulent - Ian loved it & took tons of pictures.

Walked to see Louvre pyramid, then to Notre Dame. Long line but went fast - admission free. Then we took a "vedette" (tour boat) from Pont Neuf (~~#~~13 Euros). It's one hour & you ~~see~~ learn about the bridges & monuments along the way. Unfortunately, Ian accidentally erased his memory card. We walked back to Notre Dame to take more photos & chanced upon holy Thursday before Easter mass, with choir, organ, & processional. Plus the church was better lit, so his new photos should be better. So it was kind of a silver lining.

Walked to Rue Rosiers for labels - fabulous as always. Then to see Place des Vosges & Bastille. Then a 20-min. detour to find, & wait for, a bathroom.



Finally boarded train to
Gif at 8:40. It didn't get
dark until well after 8:00.
We're tired! Arrived at house at 9:40
(10 min. walk from station.)

Friday April 6

Leave 8:30 for Chartres. Another
cold (45°) morning, with wind & fog.
We were very cold walking around
Chartres, but the cathedral was
stunning. Even with no sun shining
through them, the stained glass windows
were brilliant. Chartres is famous for
its blue glass - vibrant, electric.

Genevieve brought binoculars which
really brought the windows to life. The
interior is being cleaned & the cleaned
part is gorgeous - bright & white.
~~The~~ Walked around the old town,
had a Coque monsieur for lunch.



missed the crowds that were beginning to converge on the restaurant & cathedral.

Before lunch, toured the crypt - the underground parts of the original church (there have been multiple churches on this spot). Tour only in French & not terribly interesting. Took about one hour to drive from Gif to Chartres.

next drove to Versailles, about 45 minutes. I fell asleep... Lots of farmland, especially grain. Versailles was a zoo, parking lot jammed, long line, very crowded. Audioguides are free & worth getting. Saw the "grands appartements" & the gardens. Today there was a "grands eaux musicaux" - the fountains were turned on with music playing.

I'm glad I got to see it. The gardens don't seem like much, ~~but~~ until you walk around, when you discover



Arrived Versailles about 1:30.

Sun coming out. By mid-afternoon it was warm - hooray!

hidden grottoes with fountains, pools,
& fanciful statues.

We were very tired & left about
4:30. It was a zoo getting out because
they didn't indicate how to pay until
you got to the gate, at which point
you ~~had to~~ discovered you had to
pay at a separate machine, but by
then you were blocking the gate &
couldn't back up because of the line
behind you. Tempers were fraying...

We stopped at the bakery in Gif
to buy pain chocolat. I paid for 4
but they gave me 5 by accident, so
Ian got 2 (plus the pain raisin I also
bought him). Genevieve is making
tart with salmon & leeks plus vegetable
soup for dinner!

I initially had the upstairs
room & Ian was downstairs,
but it turns out that ~~they~~

their neighbor's daughter
needed a place to stay with
her husband & one year old, ~~to~~
starting tonight, so I will share Ian's
room.

Sat April 7

Emmanuel drove us to the
Massy-Palaiseau station, about 15 min.
from their house. We're now on the
TGV to Avignon, which takes just
over 3 hours. Our tickets cost ~~just~~
about \$150 each (?). We have upper
level seats - very comfortable & better
view than lower. Farmland & villages.
My first time in France in spring - lots of
tulips & daffodils, trees leafing out,
fruit tree blossoms. Seems a bit
warmer today & a bit of sun through
overcast.



Happy Holiday Group on train, drinking champagne & having fun. Looks like a family group going somewhere for the Easter holiday. France has 3 school holiday zones. Spring holiday is 2 weeks.

Dairy country. Lots of white cows, hedgerows. Also lots of invasive mistletoe balls in trees, & lots of ivy climbing trees.

^{Warm & sunny!} Arrived in Avignon right on time 12:36. Walked to front of station, past water feature with loud frogs blowing up their cheeks with mating glee & fishes of oranges & reds.

Waited at gate a bit then called Madeleine, who had parked & gone inside, thinking she'd ~~see~~ see us. I had forgotten what a whirlwind of words & energy she is. Talks a non-stop mile a minute! She drives a beat up old blue van & lives in an

old stone farmhouse at the end of narrow, windy road on a small island in the middle of the Rhone river, just a stone's throw from old town Avignon. She had been up late, hosting a slumber party for 16 14 year olds, one of whom brought a bottle of whiskey he cracked after she went to bed at 1:30. At 2:30 the kids woke her up to let her know that two of the kids were throwing up everywhere. We arrived as she was dealing with the aftermath, so it was a bit hectic.

Her house & life are controlled chaos anyway. Her house is a jumble - stuff piled & strewn everywhere. She has an extra room, sometimes used by boarders from her kids' Waldorf School. Only 1 boarder is here this weekend - Vivien. He's really nice, as are Madeleine's two boys - Leo, 14, and Jonas, 10.

After a late lunch (3:00) of hamburgers cooked over a wood fire, homemade bread, goat cheese, hummus, eggs from her chickens, & fruit, & leftover birthday cake, she drove us down to the 'free' shuttle boat that takes people across the river from the island to town. She then went to a tango class in Nimes!

We wandered all over Avignon. At first we were unimpressed by the back streets we found, but then we stumbled into the center of town, with pedestrian streets, shops, cafes, & plazas, & at last we emerged onto the plaza in front of the imposing papal palace. You could almost feel the ghosts of their stern countenances glaring down on you.

Forgot to say that when we first got to Avignon we climbed a long series of steps up to the gardens



behind the palace. The view is great & you can see the river, the houses, & the country beyond. But it smelled like feces & wasn't a very inviting park.

~~After~~ We left Avignon, around 7³⁰ ~~am~~ & began walking to Madeleine's across the bridge, down the riverside promenade of the island, Barthelasse, & toward her house. But we ~~turned~~ got stumped at the first intersection, & weren't sure which way to go. We tried going right & walked for a long way until we decided it must be wrong. So we backtracked & went the other way. (Forgot to say it started raining in Avignon & was still raining.)

But we got to the end of that road, where it intersected with a main road, & knew that was wrong, so we called Madeleine, who was en route

from Nimes & picked us up
within minutes.



~~Once~~ Once home, she
whipped up a pot of rice & lentils
& a veal stew in no time, plus
a fruit salad & radishes with hummus.
The stew was a little weird, with too
much curry, ginger, & black pepper for me,
but otherwise delicious. Dinner ended
at 10 pm! The boys are a lot of fun,
when they can get a word in edgewise
around their mom!

Ian started a fire in the woodstove
in her kitchen & it was all quite cozy
& warm, despite the clutter & mess,
which are hard for me to be comfortable
around.

Slept like a log for 9 hours -
up at 7:30.

Easter Sunday, April 8



Cool & very windy today, but sunnier. Walked into town about 10. Straight to Pope's Palace, which was amazing. Each room more impressive than the last. Left there at 1, grabbed a baguette sandwich at a shop, & met Madeleine at 2, en route to Nîmes for her 4-hour tango class. So we got the unexpected bonus of seeing the Roman ruins there. The arena, the maison carré - a beautifully restored temple with columns - & the Magna Tower high on a hill above a beautiful garden. Nîmes is a showcase city - clean, with beautifully restored plazas ^{park} & pedestrian walking streets. It's a really pleasant place to visit. They've done a great job of blending new & old. Madeleine's current

22-minute

3D history film in maison carré was very well done. Great panoramic views of Provence from the air!



boyfriend is an architect who lives in Nîmes, & most of his work is civic restorations.



We met Madeleine at 7:15 & drove back to Avignon, about 45 min. Such a treat to have our own tour guide & to be chauffeured through the rural back roads.

The 3 boys stayed home all day & were happy to pile in & go to the restaurant down the road for crispy, thin crust pizza (mine was 3 cheese, with blue, goat, & mozzarella - yum) & profiteroles (little pastries stuffed with ice cream & covered in chocolate sauce). I was able to pay as a hostess gift, which I was happy about.

~~BBB~~

Pink-blossomed Judea(?) trees.

Pollarding trees common - keeps them from getting too big?

Plane trees (Sycamore?) are beautiful puzzle-barked street trees - must provide wonderful shade in summer.



Easter Monday, April 9



A beautiful warm sunny day! Ian has a cold :-
Left Madeleine's at 9 & walked one hour to Ville Neuf, the "newer" part of old Avignon on the other side of the river, where the cardinals moved when Avignon became a major pilgrimage destination - crowded & very smelly.

We really like it over there. It's only a 20 minute walk from the Popes' Palace (or a 1,20 euro bus ride) but not so many tourists go there. The streets are narrower, the houses more vine-covered & picturesque. Walked around in St. Andrew's Fortress up on walls & into towers. Fantastic views out over countryside & to mountains beyond. A blue Provence sky today, just a bit hazy.

Walked back to "old" Avignon to see the Pont Benezét, made famous in the song I learned in high school French: Sur le Pont d'Avignon.



Bought some food for the train, then had a nice lunch of kebab & panini sandwiches at a kiosk before walking back to Madeleine's, arriving about 2. Finished packing, had a quick visit, said goodbye to the boys, & Madeleine drove us to the central train station about 3:15. Boarded a train to Port Bou Spain that left at 3:40. I asked the conductor a question & didn't understand his response. He disdainfully asked the other conductor if he spoke English (since I didn't appear to speak French). I replied that I understood French well but just hadn't understood him. He repeated his answer slowly, & then I understood him - he had a heavy Provence accent!

This train is the milk run - it's stopping at lots of small towns along the coast - we'll get some nice views of the countryside.

~~Numbers~~ ^{several} clusters of wind turbines - same style as ours.



Lots of birds in estuaries.

Many parabolic kites flying on sunny, windy beaches. Many glimpses of mediterranean. Vineyards, green & brown fields (yellow flowers are ripeseed).

Wisteria vines blooming. Snow-covered peaks of Pyrenées in view after Narbonne. Vines are cut back to stumps because of the wind, Madeleine says.

Easy transfer to sleeper train at Spanish border (Port Bou). Only 7:30 but berths already made up, so have to either stand ~~or lie down~~ in hall or lie down until sleepy. We were sleepy, having walked 8-10 miles (and with Ian's cold). Compartment is tight - suitcases barely fit under bottom bunk. Luckily only 4 people in compartment. Slept pretty well with some tossing & turning due

to stuffy air, hard bed, & sleeping too long, but woke feeling rested.



Tuesday April 10 Madrid

Had hot cocoa at the Chamartin train station while waiting for the information desk to open. Learned our metro stop & walked the short distance to the metro. My credit card wouldn't work in the machine. I misunderstood & thought the machine only took cards. The helpful metro agent told me there was a "caja" nearby. I thought it meant "cashier," but forgot it means ATM. After a few minutes of confusion, a really nice young man explained that we could use cash in the ticket machine (obvious once I looked). Bought a 10-ticket pass for 9,30 euros. Ian navigated

us easily to our hotel, a few blocks from the metro stop.



We rang the button multiple times but no one answered. Then a man came down the street & let us in - he was apparently a courier (?) & had a key. The Hostal Jaén is perfect - clean, nicely decorated, friendly older man at the desk (Ruffino), room small but well laid out, with sink, shower, wi-fi, closet (toilet down the hall). Ian's taking a short nap before we head out.

Left hotel 11:30. Bought yogurt from a small grocery & ate them in a small plaza near the hotel. Caught the hop-on hop-off Twibus next to the Prado museum. 1.5 hour tour around the center of Madrid. Not as good as Mexico City's - music, commentary not well-timed, doesn't cover as large an area. Bought a large chunk of Brie for only about \$4 and ate it with our baguette from yesterday, sitting

on a bench in front of the Prado.

The sky is blue & the thermometer says 20°C , but the wind is very cold. Then we got on route 2 of the Twibus, which covers newer parts of town (and overlaps some of route 1). That's about an hour. Then we bought apples & walked to the Royal Palace. [The Twibus was ~~€~~20 euro - not sure I'd recommend it, since you can easily walk to everything it visits. The commentary is heavy on names & dates - not something everyone cares about or remembers.] We chose the smaller streets to walk to the palace. Bought apples along the way.

The palace was amazing. Ian liked it better than Versailles, although it was modeled on ~~the~~ Versailles. Words are hard to describe the opulence & lushness. Ian especially loved the armory. By then I was flagging (sore back from so much standing).



When we left the palace about 6 pm it was raining.



We had planned to try eating a bit later, like the locals, but wanted to get out of the rain. Plus we were tired & wanting an early evening. We saw a place with a ~~€~~ 13 euro ~~fixed~~ menu del dia that looked good. We asked if it was OK to eat so early & they (pros in suits) said but of course. We opted for the more formal upstairs dining room (which we had to ourselves). A perfect blend of old ~~new~~ wood beams & floor, & new deep red & blue paint, artwork, & lighting. The waiter sang (so did our hot chocolate waiter this morning) & treated us like royalty. The food was amazing - vegetable tempura, fish soup, crusty bread, chicken with spinach & cream sauce, a steak with ~~sateed~~ potato slices, & for dessert, to-die-for strawberry ice cream & a chocolate

The waiter told us he's from North Africa & that his favorite thing in Granada are the gardens, with their clean, cold streams from the Sierra Mountains.

Bus is much cheaper than the train - 9 Euro round trip.

Arrived Toledo 11:30

brownie-like "pouf". Luckily Ian was to eat the half of my portions I couldn't finish! I did not leave a tip (per Rick Steves' book) but wondered if I should have.

Back to hotel at 9 for a hot shower (with lots of water pressure). After nagging Ian not to forget his shampoo in the shower, I left mine at Madeleine's!

Wednesday April 11

Up at 7, out at 9 to buy yogurt & get cash then hop on metro to Toledo bus station, conveniently located in the metro. Bought "open" round trip tickets to Toledo & only had to wait a few minutes. The direct bus only took 45 minutes each way. From the station in Toledo you walk uphill to the town. I was a bit underwhelmed by the town, after all the hype. It's pretty touristy (although mostly Spanish tourists) with lots of trinket shops. The most common items



Lots of people smoke here, though smoking isn't allowed indoors. They're talking about raising taxes on cigarettes.

The streets are very clean because they sweep & wash them - with soap - every night!

- smoking
- no curbs
- street washing

There are no curbs, just bollards, which makes it much easier to walk around.



are replica swords & armor, & marzipan (mazapan). I adore the latter, so had to buy some. The best part of Toledo turned out to be the Cathedral, which is the most opulent I've ever seen. It's immaculately maintained - bright white stone, no dark patina from years of candle smoke. The cathedral alone was worth the trip.

We walked & walked - ~~cobblestones~~ streets are rounded stones, hard on feet & ankles. Tried to avoid the mobs by taking side streets, but they'd all lead back to main streets.

Stopped for chocolate & churros in the afternoon. The chocolate is very thick & super yummy.

Caught 6pm bus back to Madrid. Had a few tapas on Plaza Santa Ana in a bar that had an upscale atmosphere. Tapas were about 3 euros each. we had four & were still a bit hungry. They were

delicious though. My favorites were caramelized leeks on toast with melted brie, & the torta española - potato omelet.



Then we bought some food for the train, back in our hostel neighborhood. Much ~~the~~ cheaper places to eat here, but not as nice. Got another piece of potato omelet & some fried potatoes for 1€, the portions were twice as big for half the price as the first place, though the food wasn't quite as healthy... The plate of potatoes was huge, so we made our own doggie bag (I always travel with lots of ziplock baggies). The waitress was super nice, & we could easily understand her Spanish.

Back to hotel. Granada tomorrow! Weather today was warmer, actually perfect - not hot. Sprinkles this evening.

Hotels & restaurants have wireless credit card readers.

Thurs April 12 To Granada



Leave hotel at 9 for bus station. Stop at pastry shop for breakfast buns. Cloudy & chilly today. Only took 20 minutes to get to bus station, so we had time to sit & read a bit. We have the front passenger seats with a view out front window. ~~Not~~ nice bus. Outskirts of Madrid ugly like most cities in the world, but soon into fertile red soil farmland. Vines & green fields. Bus left at 10:30. Stopped at 1 for half hour break at a place with food & restrooms. Roads are nice. Raining lightly off & on. Good travel day I guess. Passed through a part of La Mancha - a flat, dry part of Spain where Cervantes set Don Quixote. Various windmills in evidence. Watched movie  How to Train Your Dragon - cute!



Lots of olive trees. Bus driver playing obnoxious talk radio - my headphones don't drown it out. Bus too warm...

Going through hills about 80k north of Granada. Rolling hills, tops hidden in clouds - Sierras? Olive groves patched over hills like quilts with pouffy knots.

Arrive Granada 3:30. Catch bus to center. Found hostel by getting a bit lost & asking a few people. Great location near Cathedral & Plaza Nueva, yet quiet. On 3rd floor of hostel. 5-bed room but we're the only ones in it. Two young Americans running the place for the French owner. Two adorable vagabonds from VA. There's a kitchen we can use.

Wandered all afternoon. Chilly with intermittent sun & sprinkles.





Amazing views of Alhambra.
Wandered in ~~the~~ Albaysin Moorish
quarter. Hearing lots of Arabic spoken.
Many hippies with guitars, dogs,
dreadlocks, baggy clothes. Lots of
shops selling incense, Moroccan leather
goods, billowy fabrics, glass mosaic lamps.

At 8pm, Felafels for dinner. 2.5 euros!
Delicious. Fillings included tomato,
onion, carrot, corn, green olives, pickles.
With all this walking, I'm hungry.
Then dark chocolate ice cream to top
it off - yum!!

Back to hostel for email, journal, sleep.
I'm out wandering. He loves it here.

Thank goodness room has heater -
it's quite chilly.

Friday April 13



Another chilly day (8°) with wind + some rain (luckily squalls don't last long). Breakfast in the hostel kitchen - homemade bread, jam, oranges. Saw cathedral - gogolus - Royal Chapel - tombs of Isabel & Ferdinand, way cool. Felafel for lunch then ~~up~~ walked up to Alhambra (20 min. from Plaza Nueva). Luckily we went early because I left the tickets at the hostel! The walking warmed us up. It's easy to do the ticket exchange at the window up there than at a machine (the one in town was broken anyway). The walk up is beautiful, through ~~a~~ trees with water running down both sides of the path. Entered at 2 which gave us plenty of time to see the gardens & grounds before our 4:30 entrance time to the palace. The Generalife Gardens & Sultan's summer home are wonderful. The palace itself is stunning. After, we saw the fort,



which has incredible views out over the town & Sierra Madre mountains.

Back in town we bought a few groceries then found a great tapas bar - 12 for \$14 euro. They were good & it was enough food for both of us.

At 10:00 went to Le Chien Andalou for a flamenco show. There was too much music & too little dancing for me, & the dancer wasn't a classic beauty, but she did seem to be a good dancer, ~~so~~ and it was interesting & felt authentic. Small, crowded, barrel-vault ceiling (former water jar storage cave). Painted white. Nice atmosphere. Ended at midnight.

Saturday April 14

Up at 8. Tons of people here now. Our room was full. The breakfast room is a parade of people from all over.

Granada mosaic:

beautiful patterns made
with dark & light colored rounded
stones - used for paths &
courtyards

lots of mockingbirds in
Europe - think of Grant
every time I see one



It's an even colder, wetter day
today. Ian was out very late dancing
& slept til almost noon. I visited with
folks in the kitchen hangout.

Then we went looking for a Turkish
bath. The first one was full because of the
weather. We found another one 20 min.
south and made an appt. for 4 pm.

It was great! The baths weren't as hot
as I expected, but after a while you get
warmer & warmer from the inside. After
a while they call you for a 15-min.
massage, your choice of back or legs.
You help yourself to hot, sweet mint
tea. After 1.5 hours they tell you it's
time to go. I had to rent a suit,
& just decided to buy it for only
2.50 more. It's tiny & will make a
good travel suit. We walked a bit
more - there were moments of sun -
but it got wet & cold and we headed
back to the hostel. ~~Laney~~ is cooking
Laney

vegie paella & will charge 4 euro each to eat.



The paella was delicious. Lots of eggplant, artichoke hearts, carrots, olives, peas.

Stayed up until about 10:30 talking to folks in the kitchen.

I forget that I'm older than them by 20-30 years. We talked about all kinds of interesting things. I gave them all my card & said to look me up when they're in Seattle. Larey & Jamison are actually touring there this summer.

In the afternoon we said goodbye to the three nice men from South America. They were so gentle & sweet & gave us goodbye hugs.

Ian went out dancing again.

It doesn't start til midnight. Had a nice chat with an architecture student from France who's staying in our room.

Sunday April 15



My cell phone died in the night. Luckily our newest batch of room mates was up early & woke me. Had to use Ian's computer for a clock.

Left the hostel at 9 & arrived at the cold train station at 9:20 for our 10:00 bus (better early than late!). The five hours flew by between sleeping & listening to music. Ian slept the whole way. They showed two crummy movies. Note to self - bring brimmed hat on busses to block view of screen. Luckily Ian had his. Mostly rain & clouds, but some sun & one rainbow. The fields are ^{bright} green & reddish brown - very pretty.

Arrive Madrid around 3, get to hotel around 4. Sunny here.

Partial view of snow-covered mountains coming into Madrid.



Saw a guy taking a bus to go snowboarding, wearing boots & gear & carrying board. They say it's about an hour to the slopes.



~~Had~~ Walked a bit & visited the Royal Botanical Gardens where there was a lovely tulip display. Had a 7:30 dinner at a kebab place. We both had chicken - spit roasted, shaved, served with lettuce, tomato, & white & red sauces & thick pita. It was delicious (if salty) & cheap - 8.50€ for two. We walked to see Plaza Mayor one last time, but it was cold & windy, so we headed back to the hotel by about 9. Showers, pack, a few last minute preparations, & sleep.

Monday, April 16

Up at 6, metro to airport, arrive at 7:45. Big rush to get Ian's bag checked in time. Then through security & to his gate. Waved goodbye as he boarded & felt

a little sad. I hope he has a fantastic time in Italy? 



Boarded my flight at 11, 4 20 minutes into the flight they announced that there was a problem with the wing somethings. So we had to go back to Madrid. I felt very severe about the whole thing - grateful it didn't happen on the way over, grateful I didn't have to get back at a certain time. There was quite a lot of disorganized waiting at the United counter, then at the baggage carousel, then  for a bus to the hotel, where they served us a great buffet lunch. One Italian man took the role of spokesman and relayed information to everyone (there are something like 240 of us). Everyone seemed to be pretty good-natured about it. I feel



bad for the people with young kids. We staying at the Auditorium, an absolutely enormous conference hotel. I'm spending my time reading in the lobby, & using their computer to do email. They have a sauna but, alas, no hot tub.

Hopefully our flight will leave at 11 tomorrow. Even if they'd fixed the plane, they couldn't let the crew fly again today, or they would have exceeded the number of hours they're allowed to fly.

The doors have just opened for dinner at 8pm, & I'm waiting for someone interesting to go in so I can sit with them.