

Seatac security: no shoes off, no laptop out, no bins, no x-ray.
Guy said "It's like we're back in the 80s." New big chairs /
in waiting area - comfy.

Mon, Aug 18, 2023

Exchange #1 = €1.09

British Airways flight 48 left over an hour late, at 9 pm. Hope I make my connection to Dublin. Seat 32E, smack in the middle. Can't turn off screens! Seats very small. No air controls.

We sat for another hour because they had to offload some passengers & their luggage for some reason.

The original delay was due to a massive computer glitch at Heathrow. I was not notified of the delay. Meanwhile there was a direct Aer Lingus flight to Dublin. I sure wish I'd booked that!

I was miserable crammed in the middle seat, so after an 11 pm or later meal I moved to an empty aisle seat. I was able to sleep for most of the flight. When we arrived at Heathrow the jetway malfunctioned so we had to wait 45 minutes for a stairway. I missed my flight to Dublin. After a very confusing search I finally found the service desk. After waiting in line for over 2 hours with only 2 agents and a lot of angry people I was told I could only rebook by phone and there were no more flights available today so they sent me to a hotel. Ibis Budget. Find the shuttle, long drive, now on hold with British Air who are saying that because I booked through American Airlines

(unknowingly) they may not be able to help me. Apparently they rebooked me on a flight at 8pm but I was never notified. So frustrating! If I had stayed in line I would have found out, and would have made my flight.

Rebooked for 6:40 am. Booked a car for 24 lbs, as no shuttles that early. Hotel dinner looked gross, plus I don't want to eat before sleeping, so grabbed three squares of dense oatcake - one for now, two for breakfast.

Slept fitfully, up at 2:45. Pillows too thick, glad I had my inflatable. Piercing blue smoke alarm^{night} blinking over bed, glad I had my eye mask. Quiet night.

Wed Aug 30

Tuesday sort of disappeared in the time change.

There was no customs arriving at Heathrow, and the passport control was automated, with no stamp. Passport scanners and facial recognition are becoming standard, and it's so much faster & easier.

Three Asian folks were waiting in the hotel lobby looking lost & confused. They didn't know how to get to the airport. I offered to share my car. They were so grateful! And they wouldn't let me pay my share. Hugs all around. Arrived at the Aer Lingus counter

wasn't open yet so I sat on the floor to wait with a few others. Two women arrived behind me and when I heard their Irish accents, I stood up to say hi. Mary Donovan & Geraldine are cousins who'd come to London to celebrate Mary's 70th and been stranded an extra two days. They were lovely.

The desk opened at 5 and I was most relieved when I was holding that boarding pass! The flight wasn't full, so I got a window seat for some lovely views of English farm fields and the Dublin coast. The flight left on time and only took an hour! It really worked out to not catch yesterday's night flight: I got to fly in daylight, I didn't arrive late & disturb others sleeping, no walking in Dublin in the dark, and no chance of Covid in a private room. They announced that they had cigarettes for sale on the plane, and I have noticed a lot of smokers in Dublin.

There was no customs at the airport, and I was at the curb waiting for the bus by 8:10. Waited 25 minutes. Travel involves a lot of waiting, but there's usually something interesting to observe. The 700 bus cost 8 Euros and dropped me off on O'Connell Street, just a few blocks from the hostel. They were still serving breakfast so I had a nice bowl of cereal and made myself a sandwich for later. The hostel is huge, and appears to be cobbled together from adjoining buildings. There's a big shared

kitchen and multiple common areas. My dorm room sleeps 8 in bunks. I'm paying 33 euros a night.

I was out and about by 10, so I've had the whole day to explore the city. The hostel is right on the River Liffey.

I crossed O'Connell Bridge and walked the short distance to Trinity College to admire the lovely old buildings, bell tower, and grounds. Sunny with a chilly breeze.

St. Stephen's Green is a lovely park with ponds, swans, and flowers. Ate my sandwich on a bench in the sun. In Sweny's Pharmacy, famous from James Joyce, they serenade you with an Irish tune. You're supposed to buy lemon soap (I did not). I haven't read Joyce.

I had a 1pm reservation to see The Book of Kells, a beautifully preserved illuminated manuscript from the year 800. An exhibit shows enlarged copies of some of the gorgeous, colorful illustrations, and demos how they made vellum from calf skin, the pigments & quills used, and the binding process. Upstairs is the "Long Room," the ancient vault-ceilinged library with 200,000 old books. The library is being updated with modern fire protection and climate control to protect the books. The books are being "decarbed" (removed), cleaned, and stored during the renovation. It was really interesting to watch the workers

(no photos allowed) and see videos of the conservation process. It felt like a historic time to be there. Grafton Street is a pedestrian shopping street with buskers. Temple Bar is a charming, touristy pedestrian zone near the river.

Impressions: I love hearing the Irish accent all around me - utterly charming. I haven't needed cash for anything. The city center has lots of busses and trams, few cars, lots of bicycles, and mobs of pedestrians. The sidewalks are crowded! Cruise ships dock here, alas, adding to the crush. The city is clean - workers with electric trash collection carts and powered sidewalk sweepers. Georgian (neo-classical) architecture: brick, stone, copper. Lots of diversity and many languages being spoken.

I got tired and went back to the hostel at 3 for a nap. Booked my train to Cork, wrote a birthday postcard to Alex, met Bianca, a lovely young woman from Australia. Walked to the post office on O'Connell to mail the post card (€2,20!). Dinner at the Oval Bar, a charming pub recommended by the hostel. The beef and onion soup didn't have a lot of flavor, and the brown bread was a bit dry, but the atmosphere is great, with tin walls & ceiling, and dozens of kinds of whiskey bottles lining the walls.

There are a few beggars here, lots of buskers, a few "winos." It's hard to get used to vehicles driving on the left, and remembering

4
which way to look before crossing the street!

I strolled a bit after dinner. Saw people sleeping on the street. No place is immune. As I left the pub, a woman told me this is one of the few real Irish pubs left in Dublin. She says many have turned into sports bars. At 7:30 pm many of the shops were closed or closing.

Back at the hostel many of the young people were just getting ready to go out for the night. It felt crowded. The underbed storage bins are great because they lock, but when pulled out, you can't walk past. It's a co-ed dorm, about half guys. No one snored!

I slept great. Up at 6. Gulls crying reminds me that this is a coastal city.

Thur Aug 31

met a French guy at breakfast who hitchhikes all over and volunteers on a Greenpeace boat to confront illegal whalers. 30-minute walk along the river to Heuston train station. Swans, bridges, light rain, boardwalk along part, commuters walking & biking. Busses & trains stop in front of station. Interesting brief conversation with two people about the famine ships that took people to America. It would be wonderful if I could figure out

which one John & Hanora Donovan were on. The station itself is clean, attractive, and easy to navigate. Ticket cost to Cork is €33 and took 2.5 hours. I accidentally booked a rear-facing seat. There are four seats with a table. My only seatmate slept or watched her phone the whole trip. Free wifi, plus USB ports for charging.

The route went down the middle of the country, through Port Laoise, Thurles, Limerick Junction, and Mallow. Lots of sheep & dairy cattle. The old houses have tons of charm but I wonder if they are hard to heat & maintain. Solar & wind farms. You need your ticket to get in and out of the train, so no one checks your ticket on board.

Irish (aka Gaelic) is the national language. Signs & announcements are in Gaelic first. Fun to hear it spoken.

Arrived in Cork at 12:30. The South African Irish fellow I met offered to walk me to the bus station, but he lost his ticket and had to go to a service desk. Meanwhile I had to use the bathroom and there was a long line. No sign of him after that, ~~so~~ so off I went.

Turns out the bus stops next to the river just a few minutes' walk away. I waited about 30 minutes. Sunshine. The bus left at 1:45. €8 and 1:10 to Clonakilty. Couldn't keep my eyes open. My AirBnB host, Anne, recommended O'Donovan's for an early dinner (she's outside of town, with no access to restaurants). I ordered a small portion of pork with mashed potatoes, applesauce, and vegetable. The vegetable turned out to be pureed parsnips or something root-y.

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It was a large portion.^{£11} Lots of locals eating here and schoolkids grabbing a snack. Rock playing at low volume. Adjacent to a hotel. The restaurant / hotel is on the charming main street with cute shops and cafes.

Ticéad Solúbtha - Duine Fásta

Flexible - Adult

Ainm/Name: Story Karen

Uimhir/Number 54662249

€32.99

Turas Amach/Out

31.08.23

6/From

Dublin Heuston 10:00

Cork Kent

Suiochán/Seat
B39

TFI TRANSPORT FOR IRELAND Neamh-inaistríthe/Non transferable Iarnród Éireann Irish Rail

Houses are painted bright colors, there's a big old church (stone), and a house where Independence hero Michael Collins lived for three years as a child. There's a Friday farmer's market in the park.

My AirBnB host, Anne McCullagh, kindly picked me up and drove me to her house above town. (It's a 20-minute brisk walk uphill). Her house is gorgeous, custom-built 25 years ago with her husband, who died 12 years ago. It's a large house on a big property; AirBnB income allows her to keep it. It's U-shaped, with stone curving "wings". I have my own bathroom down the hall. my room has a twin bed, writing desk, armoire, and view of the garden with afternoon sun streaming in. She won't be the social

Clonakilty

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kind of host - I'm on my own. She left a homemade oatmeal cookie for me.

\$55 per night total. She looks to be about 70 and drives an Audi A4.

I was tempted to take a nap, but decided to go walking instead. She lives on a narrow lane. The sour smell of cow manure wafting from adjacent fields. Walked into town. Saw a man who looked just like a leprechaun. It's a lovely day, alternating sun and clouds, 63° at 7 pm. Gas is over \$7/gallon.

Walked along the bay until a flooded section. Hedges of hardy fuchsia, ^{rosehips} and orange crocosmia. Had a cool shower - couldn't get the hot water to work. Nice Zoom call with Christopher Jonck in Germany. Crash at 9:30.

Friday Sept. 1

Slept great. Dark & quiet, bed a bit hard. Anne left a slice of brown bread with butter & jam and a bowl with fruit. Up at 5:30. Lots of email & other computer stuff to do. I'd bought a yogurt at the market in town.

A lovely morning, partly cloudy, 53°. Lots of traffic in town at 8:30, kids walking to school. Saw a mom & dad with horse & cart taking two kids to school. Wandered around town before catching the bus about 9:30. The farmer's market was just setting up. Crepes, baked goods,

Vegetables. I love the slate-roofed stone houses. I can't believe the huge trucks that somehow squeeze through these tiny towns. It sure feels weird to drive on the left. Turns and intersections and roundabouts are especially non-intuitive!

Beautiful scenery on the 30-minute bus ride to Skibbereen, partly along the coast through Rosscarberry. "The Wild Atlantic Way."

In Skibbereen I went straight to the Heritage Center, which has a nice exhibit about the potato famine. It also has an interesting video about Loch Hyne, a nearby tide-fed saltwater lake marine reserve.

I had a tasty veggie sandwich at a cute bookstore in town, then walked the "Abbey Loop." The skies opened and I got soaked. My poncho leaked. Luckily I also brought a raincoat. My quick dry pants and waterproof boots were a success. I was able to take shelter at O'Donovan's sports center under a roofed area until the rain slowed, which took about an hour. Although I didn't have time to do the famine walk, I was able to listen to the audio while waiting.

The walk included a viewpoint overlooking town & River Ilen (Eye-ien), the Abbeystrawry Cemetery & its poignant famine plots, and a lovely walking path along the river. Scary

Walking on the narrow roads & remembering which way is "facing traffic". Cars drive fast.

Back in town I grabbed a scone at a market that served "Seattle's Best Coffee"!

At 3 I met Margaret, the genealogist at the Heritage Center. She was so knowledgeable, and I learned a lot (see separate genealogy notes). €50 for one hour, totally worth it. Then she offered to drive me to Castle Donovan, 30 minutes away! I gave her €20 for gas. I ended up getting three hours of her time, and she told me so many interesting things, about Ireland's rural exodus, young people wanting to leave farm life, Gaelic language resurgence, immigration.

Donovan Castle was a magical craggy stone tower house, half ruined, overlooking impossibly green rolling hills. It had become a warm, sunny day. A family with two small children was laughing as a horse tried to nibble one child's clothes.

Margaret dropped me at the bus in Skibbereen with 5 minutes to spare, flying down narrow roads barely wide enough to pass. The bus was 15 min late. A beautiful rainbow coming back to Clonakilty!

Had a vegan burger at Craft & Co., an eatery on the square filled with locals of all ages sitting indoors & outside on a warm Friday evening, loudly & happily eating and drinking! Everywhere I've eaten you

pre-pay when ordering, which makes it so easy to leave when you're done.

Home at 8, to sleep at 10 after computer catch-up.

Sat Sept 2

Slept til 7! Lots of computer chores and travel to arrange. And journaling.

Note about yesterday. I wondered how I would fill the whole day in Skibbereen, but it filled up and flew by, reminding me that travel is like an empty box that fills with treasures if you stay open!

Ticket Type
 Adult
 Child
 Family
 Student

€6

Senior Citizen

Complimentary

Group

No. in Group

Skibbereen Heritage Centre

The Famine Story
 Genealogy Service (by appointment)
 The Lough Hyne Visitors Centre

Old Gasworks Building
 Skibbereen, West Cork, Ireland
www.skibbheritage.com



Tel: +353 (0)28 40900 | Email: info@skibbheritage.com

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Out the door at 10:30. Walked up to Templebryan stone circle - a lovely walk through beautiful countryside on a perfect spring-like morning. The circle is only visible from the road - no

access path. Oncoming drivers signal to let you know they see you, and to alert cars behind them. most hedgerow plants are familiar - ivy, bramble (wild blackberry), hazelnut, hardy fuchsia, wild rose - though some are invasive in Washington, they seem native & well-behaved here. Hedgerows are great habitat for wildlife, and it's sad to see them removed for new houses. The sidewalks in front of the new houses are nice, but it would also be nice if they could mandate hedgerow replacement. Views of the bay from fancy new houses on the hill above town.

Clonakilty was filled with happy locals shopping, eating, kids playing. There's a nice grocery store where I got broccoli salad and dolmas for lunch, and a huge raisin scone for my afternoon snack. When in Turkey, I eat baklava, in Italy gelato, in France pain au chocolat, in Ireland - scones!

An amazing guitar player was busking in Astrea Square. I listened to him for quite a while and sang along. Beatles, Creedence, ELO.

I started walking the causeway out to Inchydoney Beach, about 3 miles from town. There was a nice wide sidewalk with benches. The tide was way out and the flats were gurgling. Curlews, oystercatchers, and other shorebirds. An idyllic sunny day.

Then a car stopped. A woman about my age and her daughter. They offered a ride to the beach and said it would be a very

long walk to go both ways, and the sidewalk would end soon. "What the heck," I thought. A chance to meet people. And it turned out they were O'Donovans! They live in Balinascarty, where Henry Ford's father was from. William was a famine emigrant. There is a replica model T that I will go right past on my way to Achill tomorrow.

I never cease to be touched by the kindness of people. The folks who paid my car fare in London, the man at the Heritage Center in Skibbereen who helped me get to Castle Donovan, Deirdre O'Donovan today.

Ichydoney beach is beautiful, and huge when the tide is out. Smooth sand with not a single piece of driftwood. It's the Atlantic Ocean. A gorgeous warm sunny day and the beach was popular, but not crowded because it's so big.

People swimming and body boarding. Deirdre says it can get big waves and is popular with surfers. The "Wild Atlantic" was not wild today. I couldn't have gotten luckier with the weather! I'm also glad I was able to see the coast. ~~massive~~ ~~opposite~~ ~~ignorant~~ ~~shallow~~ ~~bleak~~ ~~islands~~. Fins of jagged dark grey rock like the backs of ancient sea creatures.

Around 2:30 I headed back to town, reluctantly pulling myself away from the sea.

Deirdre told me there is no beach at all at high tide. Apparently a tsunami caused by the Lisbon earthquake in 1755 or so created the beach, depositing sand ~~at~~ in what had been a harbor. "Doney" means dunes in Gaelic.

I also learned from Deirdre that "Kil" as in the town Kilbrittain, is from the Gaelic "cill" which means church. From Deirdre and Margaret I learned that the surname prefix "O'" means "son of." Many Irish names have been Anglicized over time for various reasons, but in general it is individual preference whether families keep the O'. It could also mark people as Catholic, which some may have felt the need to hide.

Most immigrants to Ireland are Eastern European, and lately mostly Ukrainian.

It was 65° today but hot in the sun. Scary walking on narrow road with beach traffic, but there were other walkers and the cars seem used to sharing the road.

Also bicycles and people with strollers. I walked on the stone seawall part of the way. A really beautiful walk. Cows grazing, combine harvesting, hay trucks rumbling, shorebirds wheeling and screeching.

Back in town I continued my search for a taxi tomorrow to Achill, and finally found one that will take me at 9:30.

I had fried potatoes for dinner at Craft & Co. €4.40 and more than enough food. Met a lovely young couple with their

10-month old yellow lab, Finn. They lived in Ljubljana for 6 months & loved it.

A famous Irish ^{folk} group called The Tumbling Paddies is playing at Casey's tonight but sold out. I walked by hoping to hear the music drifting out, but no luck.

Back to Anne's, saying hello to magpies & hooded crows, loving the peaceful green walk.

Sunday Sept. 3

Up at 5:30, out at 8:30. Fine mist droplets in the air. In town, pretty quiet, the remains of Saturday night evident - beer bottles neatly propped next to bins. Shops still shuttered. Niall Johnson picked me up in front of O'Donovan's at 9:20 - 10 minutes early. Driving a very nice Mercedes, one of 12 he owns for his business. Friendly, chatty chap, looks older, says he loves his work and will do it til he can't anymore. Gov't also pays him to drive special needs kids to school. He loves Irish weather, hates Trump, is worried about Biden's age, and doesn't believe Gaelic was widely spoken in the 1840s.

We made a quick stop in Ballinascarthy to see the stainless steel model T Ford. Then he drove me to

Ahhill, past the GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) pitch, or sports field, where they do hurling and Gaelic football. No British sports allowed, he said. €25 euros.

Ahhill is a tiny town with a tavern, school, church, and cemetery. I found a memorial to "The O'Donovan Family - Killeens." The church does not look old. It was a 40-minute walk to the vintage festival on a quiet road through gorgeous rolling fields of green. A herd of dairy cows ran over when they saw me - I was later told they are curious.

I arrived at 11 as the fair was getting started. €10 fee for autism charity. Deirdre hadn't arrived yet. I had a delicious "breakfast roll" for lunch - sausage & grilled onions on a hoagie with ketchup. Delicious and "by donation." Chatted with a couple who moved to Ahhill in the 80s. They introduced me to Deirdre when she arrived. A lovely woman, probably in her 40s, with three daughters in tow. We chatted for a minute but she was very busy. The "tea tent" was tables laden with home baked goods, by donation. I resisted those, but did have a softserve cone for my afternoon snack.

I wandered around for 5 hours, looking at the vintage tractors, the operating 1910 threshing machine, the tractor pulls & vintage cars. I talked to quite a few people. The West Cork accent can be very hard to understand. I asked two guys if they were speaking Gaelic and they laughed. They said not that many people know how to speak it.

One guy told me there were more trees and more bogland here in the 1800s.

I had an interesting chat with a couple from County Mead. He's farming land his family's been on since the 1700s. He's also a well-known farm journalist, a bit of a local celebrity. She's a recently-retired speech pathologist who worked with autistic kids.

It was quite hot in the sun. I left at 3:45 and tried to get a ride before realizing it was only a 37-minute walk to Ballinascarthy, from where I could catch a bus. The first part of the walk was rural and lovely, but when I got to the main Cork road it became treacherous. No shoulder, blind curves, and fast cars. Then a car pulled over to offer a ride. It was Johnny, a guy I'd talked to at the fair (an employee at Deirdre's brother's construction company). He gave me a ride to Clonakilty, then asked me out for a drink. I almost laughed because I'm at least 20 years older than him! I declined and that was that.

Grabbed some dinner at Scully's grocery and back to Anne's at about 5:30.

Another story from the fair today. An older guy selling wooden hurling sticks told me he'd traveled to the US as a young man. His hurling team had won a national

competition and were invited to play abroad. He stayed with families in seven cities for about a week each. Mostly Irish descendants. They've stayed friends and some have come to visit.

At 7:30 I surprised myself by walking down to town to the music pub. De Barra's is a traditional pub filled with music memorabilia. Around 8:15 musicians began drifting in to the front room: guitars, banjos, pipes, bodhran, flute, fiddle. Soon it was standing room only. (There is a bigger space for larger concerts.) I sat with a nice couple from England on holiday. The music ranged from instrumentals (wonderful but can get a bit boring), a lyric song by a guy with a rich deep voice, a bawdy a capella, and a haunting flute guitar duo. I reluctantly left at 9:15 because I had an early morning. The horizon was still a bit orange at 9:30.

Thinking about the man who is farming his family's land since 1700s - emigration can disrupt that ancestral knowledge, making it more challenging to truly know our roots.

Anne kindly offered to drive me to the bus this morning, which gave me a chance to ask about her house. She and her husband had it designed by a friend in the shape of a round earthen ancient structure two fields away from their property. The stone is from County Clare. Anne was a ~~teacher~~ teacher of Irish (she prefers to call it that) and is passionate about the language and bilingualism. She retired two years ago, so she must be about 68.

Road sign: "Go mall - slow!" So apt, as malls are places of torpor for me.

I think I've only seen one person wearing a mask on this whole trip so far.

The bus driver was listening to a 90s radio station in Russian or similar language. The juxtaposition of the English-language songs and announcer's language I found very interesting.

The bus dropped me steps from the English Market. It was quiet on a Monday morning. It's a small, upscale place with organic produce, meats, and bakery.

I wandered a few pedestrian streets near the river and got to the train station about 11. I had a ticket for 1:25 but was able to change it to 12:25.

Lots of Turkish barbers in Ireland.

Today on the bus a woman used "sugar" as a polite expletive.

Bread and cheese for lunch, with carrot and apple and protein bar for snack. Slept much of the train ride. Arrived in Dublin at 3. Warm with cool breeze along the river. 72° today.

My room at Abbey Court Hostel is €41 instead of €33 but much nicer, with bed curtains, and full bathroom, extra sink, towel rack ensuite.

Walked north to see ~~the~~ Henrietta St a street with preserved Georgian buildings. Stopped at Lidl to get a salad, which

I ate at King's Inns Park, home of Hungry Tree, a tree which has almost completely consumed an iron bench. The neighborhood I walked through to get there had many immigrants, women in kerchiefs, a Polish store, people selling produce from street stalls.

Walked to Trinity College via the river and Temple Bar neighborhood. Rush hour streets busy, sidewalks crowded. Bikes, busses. You have to watch for bikes when crossing streets. Signs on pavement tell you which way to look before crossing.

I heard many people speaking Spanish. Too tired to walk more. Back to hostel at 6:30. I don't like the music.

Tues Sept 5

To sleep about 8:30. Wide awake 20 minutes before my 4 am alarm, so decided to get up. Walked a short distance to the well-labeled #41 bus stop. Chatted with a lovely young woman from Sao Paolo who moved here 11 months ago. She works at a pub, where she makes no tips.

£2,60

30 minutes to the airport. The bus got increasingly crowded as we went along, until it was standing room only. Arrived a little after 5 for an 8:00 flight. RyanAir to Berlin. \$71 includes checking one bag.

Dublin's population is just over half a

million but it feels like more because the space is smaller and more densely packed.

The Dublin airport is user-friendly & easy to get around. The 7:55 Ryan Air flight was delayed til 8:20. 2:20 minute flight. The seats were hard & didn't recline, but it was cheap! I had a window seat & napped off & on. Lots of wind turbines in the channel between England & Holland. No sign of dikes north of Amsterdam, but I didn't know what to look for. Every inch of land manicured and used for something. Rectilinear fields, a few forests, fields, tiny towns, wind turbines. The only things not straight are the roads and rivers. Clear view, no clouds at all. Few trees until between Hanover & Berlin.

Landed at 11:45. Easy in-person passport control, no customs. Walked to information office in nearby Terminal 1 to learn how to take the train into the city and buy a ticket. Great office and very helpful.

The train took about an hour and cost €4. I met a nice British couple from Scotland. I got off at the Friederichstrasse station and it was only a 10 minute walk to my hostel, mostly along the river. I'm at



Meininger Humboldt Haus on Oranienburger Strasse in the central Mitte neighborhood. Arrived at the hotel about 2. The room is really nice. Coed, 8 beds (bunks) with 2 ensuite bathrooms (one with shower + sink one with toilet + sink). You choose any empty bed. I chose a bottom bunk by the window with a view of a beautiful old brick building with copper domes. €117 for three nights. Had a nice shower, did a little laundry. No underbed storage bins here, but there are lockers and I have a little stool for a bedside table. They provide a towel. Room 406.

There's a nice lounge area and outdoor courtyard. The bottom bunks are taller, so I can sit up.

I had a roll and cheese before getting on the plane, and a protein bar when I got off. I was hungry and headed out about 4 for a late lunch/early dinner. Wanted to sit by the river so I chose a place that had a €10 chicken cordon bleu special. Turned out to be fried, and came with fries. Hope it doesn't upset my digestion, but it sure did taste good.

83° today. I walked along the river after dinner. What a beautiful evening in a beautiful city! Parks all along the river were full of people and buskers. Alcohol allowed in parks. And smoking. Lots of outdoor cafes. River boat cruises. So many beautiful buildings! The cathedral is stunning. People speaking English with so many accents. Techno DJ music blaring from a club.

Back at the hostel I met Max, an 18-year-old from Bakewell, England, who's off to Cambridge to

study German and Portuguese. In the hostel lobby some young guys who are staying here wolf whistled at me. I'm pretty sure they were being sarcastic. It kind of shocked me. Maybe they'd been drinking.

Wed. Sept. 6

Crashed about 9:30. Noise from the street below for a while, and upper bunk mate arriving late, but it really didn't bother me.

Up at 6:15, dressed and out without waking dormies. Rewe grocery store close by had yogurt, granola, apple. Back to hostel for breakfast in courtyard. Out to explore at 7:45 while it was still nice and cool. First stop Checkpoint Charlie, a small replica of the original (now in a museum). Interpretive signs tell the story. I had forgotten that West Berlin was completely surrounded by East Germany.

Long walk to Eastside Wall murals. Not through super attractive areas. Lots of graffiti. So many bicycles, many with front kid carriers, few helmets. Lots of bike lanes. Sidewalks don't feel crowded, even at rush hour.

The gallery murals were great - some were really moving. Other signage helped me understand how forbidding the wall was. I left just as bus tour crowds were arriving. Sat by the river eating my apple

until a persistent wasp drove me away. Lots of garbage everywhere. Long grass in many parks looks unkempt but may be for pollinators. So many people with tattoos. Many German school groups.

Got a great €4 sandwich at a little cafe: hearty brown seed roll, thick rounds of brie, tomato, lettuce. Ate it at a table in the shade with a nice breeze.

The Gendarmenmarkt, most beautiful square in Berlin, is under renovation, but you can still see the two beautiful churches, and climb a short platform to look behind the construction fence.

Pink & blue pipes snaking over the road here and elsewhere around the city are for carrying water from the river to construction sites.

Loud sing song sirens here, though they aren't as high-pitched and piercing as ours.

Ampelmännchen are cute "walk" and "don't walk" crossing icons. They're unique to Berlin and a line of stores has sprung up to capitalize.

The free Tränenpalast museum at the Friederichstrasse train station has poignant displays of what it was like living in a divided city, where families were often separated.

85° today. Back to hostel at 1:30 for shower, nap, and to give the blister on my little toe a break. Rewe for an apple strudel, to eat in hostel lobby. Some of the kids staying here look so young! ~~There is beer for sale in the lobby vending machine.~~

Back to Rewe for the salad bar: greens, carrots, edamame, chicken, feta, yogurt dressing, £2.

Walked along the river. I love the mix of old & new architecture here, and all the inviting public spaces. As I walked past the Wassertaxi river boat, I saw that it was leaving in 15 minutes. The sun wasn't blazing. I decided to go for it. €20 and worth it. Delightful, mostly empty, low key announcing of sights in German and English. One hour. Up the river to a lock then down to the Tiergarten past many sights. Nice breeze. People all along the river, walking, riding, sitting, dining, drinking, dancing the tango.

Walked to Nikolaiviertel, the reconstructed historical medieval heart of the city. I loved its cobblestone church streets and old church. Nice atmospheric cafes. Its on the river.

I've seen quite a few homeless tents.

The city has an extensive public transit system of trains, trams, and busses.

Walked farther down Unter den Linden, the Prussian heart of the city (restored).

So beautiful. At one point I stopped to take a picture of the cathedral. A young man said to me in German, "Very beautiful," and it was great to understand him.

A very talented violinist who calls himself the "String Mockingbird" was playing in the Lustgarten at sunset. A magical moment. People dancing tango in Montbijou along the river.

Back at the hostel at 8:30. New dorm mates Jeremy (from Vancouver) and

Holly (from England).

Thurs Sept 7

After breakfast I walked along the river to the Reichstag, then to the majestic Brandenburg Gate and into the cool, forested Tiergarten. Bicycle commuters whizzing along every trail. You have to pay attention in this town if you don't want to get mowed down!

Potsdamer Platz has been rebuilt out of the bulldozed "death zone" around the wall, which went right through this area. A short section of wall is still standing. The new buildings are ultra-modern and eclectic. A circle of a dozen international food trucks with umbrella'd tables.

The Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe is a vast array of 2700 dark grey rectangles of varying heights. In some areas they tower over you and you feel imprisoned. Cobbled paths wind between.

Tour groups standing around listening to guides. My back hurts just looking at them.

Salad bar for lunch then back to hostel to cool off & rest my feet. Decided not to do DDR museum - too crowded. Would be €13.50.

At 2 pm I met William Jones, a man from Kirkland who is on the leaf blower committee. He's been teaching at Humboldt University here as a visiting professor. We met in the Prenzlauer Berg and walked around. First to the Zion church (nothing special) then to Mauer Park (also

also nothing special, though it was interesting to see thick layers - slabs - of graffiti paint peeling off a long wall.

William bought me a sparkling pink lemonade at a biergarten, and an order of curryworst to try - delicious and not spicy. Wurst & fries with a flavorful red sauce. Then we went to a restaurant near the park called Oderquell for German I had gnocchi with broccoli & walnuts. €14,50. Back to hostel. Every cafe (and there are many) filled with people enjoying the beautiful summer evening.

8:45 history + light show at Reichstag on the river was well done. 30 minutes.

Friday Sept. 8

A noisy night (sirens, loud trucks) but it didn't really bother me.

Many residential and commercial buildings here have courtyards - a place for trees, kids to play, and an escape from street noise and hubub. Also a way to meet neighbors.

"This bed
is taken."
Meininger
Humboldt House
hostel, Berlin



Holly, a young woman in my hostel room, had an upsetting incident yesterday when she felt very vulnerable when a weird guy sort of stalked her in the park. It left her feeling a little scared of traveling alone. (I overheard her phone call to a friend.) So I checked in to see how she was doing, and offer some perspective from my experiences. I urged her to not quit. She seemed to feel better after we chatted.

easy, right in front of hostel

I caught the bus¹ to the train station and got there way too early, but it gave me time to buy a sandwich (gouda, tomato, lettuce, cuke, butter on dark seed bread) for lunch. The train information was confusing. My ticket said wagon 5, but that didn't exist. Finally it told me wagon 31, but that turned out to be on the other end of the train and you couldn't walk between the two halves of the train. At Halle I got off and onto the correct wagon. My seat was occupied, but I learned that several trains were canceled today and all seat reservations were accordingly canceled. So the train was very full, standing room only. I found a great spot between seat backs where I could comfortably sit or stand. I chatted with a lovely young woman doing "sexual studies" at the university in Halle. She offered to take turns sharing her seat (how nice was that?).

An adorable 6-month-old baby lay on her tummy on the adjacent table, cooing and kicking. After an hour or so some people got off and a seat

opened up at the baby's table (she was sleeping by then). An older gentleman got on and had to stand. I felt bad and decided I'd sit for an hour, then trade with him for the last hour. When I got up to offer him my seat, the baby's dad insisted on giving me his seat!

The four-hour trip flew by. At the station there was a group of four guys drinking + clinking and getting progressively louder and happier; business types.

At the station in Frankfurt I found my way pretty easily to the S-Bahn platform and caught an earlier train to Mainz, only 45 minutes. Christopher met me at the station, and it was so great to see him after six years! We took ~~the train~~^{the bus} to their apartment in Weisenau, about 15 minutes away, where Sarah and adorable 18-month-old Mathilda were waiting. Their apartment is clean, bright, compact, and new. I am sleeping in Mathilda's room. We had a lovely dinner of roasted veggies and hummus. I drew watermelons for Mathilda, and gave her a unicorn book. She is adorable! Christopher took me for a long walk around their two neighborhood parks. Stadt, or city, park is more upscale. Volks park is more working class, with playground, water park for little kids (like a splash park on steroids), sports areas, lots of Turkish families grilling.

Sat Sept 9

Mainz

31

I slept great and until 6:45! Mathilda slept in too. Their house is on the airport flight path but I never heard a thing. I dreamed in German.

Chris & Sarah live in Wiesbaden. They are both in medical school. Germany gives students \$1000 euros a month and free tuition for up to 6 years. Of that, you only have to pay back €8-10,000. So they have a wonderful work-life balance. Also, medical students don't study or work as many hours as in the US.

After a delicious breakfast of fruit, yogurt, and crunchy muesli, we walked into Mainz, through the park and down along the river to the Cathedral. It took 30 minutes (plus time for stops). One stop was at the aviary in the Stadtpark, with macaws and other cute little tropical birds. There are many escaped wild parrots that live in the park, and you can hear them chattering.

Along the river is a row of alternating old and new houses - the old ones escaped war damage and the new ones didn't.

In the square in front of the cathedral was the 3x/week farmer's market, with beautiful fruit, vegetables, cheese, bread, and meat. It's a popular place for an unusual breakfast: wine and sausage. This is a wine capital of the world.

Inside the very old (war damage restored) Mainz Cathedral, a choir sang briefly and sounded amazing in that space. The organ played a bit too.

Sarah headed back with tired Mathilda. Christopher took me through the old town with

ancient (restored) half timbered houses and cobbled streets. Loved it! Another wine tent, this kind traditionally eaten with onion cake.

Then we climbed up stairs to the non-touristy part of town and went to Christopher's favorite ~~p~~ café, called Dicke Lilli Gutes Kind, which means "Fat Lilli, Good Girl," the title of German actress Lilli Palmer's autobiography.

I had broccoli and cauliflower soup with hearty rye bread. Loved the atmosphere. Popular with young people. There's a big university here, Johannes Gutenberg.

After lunch we popped into St. Stephan's church to see the stunning blue windows designed by French Jewish artist Marc Chagall. Before lunch we popped into Augustinerkirche in old town, with ornate ceiling frescoes and gold leaf.

It was hot, but we walked back to the apartment through the Roman citadelle, where they were having a festival with food & music, and then past the Roman theater ruins, into Stadtspark. Rose garden, spikeball, amazing splash park, kiddie train.

Shower, nap, waffles. Matilda helps with everything and is quite capable. She goes to Montessori school where kids are given a lot of autonomy. We ate the delicious waffles with applesauce and chocolate ice cream!

Then we took Matilda to the splash park. It was a busy place! It's the nicest

splash park I've ever seen.

I walked with Sarah to the grocery store. Back at the apartment we had Abendbrot, "evening bread" aka supper. Bread, cheese, meats, my leftover hummus and roast vegetables. Fleischwurst turns out to be ... bologna!

Today we also saw a big yoga class in the park and a spikeball tournament. They also have frisbee golf, mini golf, and several nice playgrounds.

Sun Sept. 10

After another tasty yogurt, fruit, muesli breakfast, I headed out at 9 to walk to town along the river. A beautiful morning with lots of people walking & biking. I continued past the cathedral to Gartenfeldplatz in the New Town. Church bells ringing on Sunday. Beer gardens and places to hang out along the river. Walking paths and greenery everywhere, making it very pleasant to be a pedestrian.



Gutenberg-Museum
Mainz

Buch-, Druck- und Schriftgeschichte
Weltmuseum der Druckkunst
Liebfrauenplatz 5, 55116 Mainz
Telefon: 0 61 31-12 26 40/44, Fax: 0 61 31-12 34 88
E-Mail: gutenberg-museum@stadt.mainz.de
www.gutenberg-museum.de
Di-Sa 9-17 Uhr, So 11-17 Uhr, Mo und an gesetzl. Feiertagen geschlossen



Landeshauptstadt
Mainz



3,00

ERMÄSSIGTE SENIOREN AB 63 JAHRE
10.09.2023

At Werner's Bakery there was a long line so I knew it must be good. I got a chocolate "croissant" (pain chocolat).

Gutenberg museum: He lived here and made his printing improvements here. The museum houses some of his bibles plus many old books and various kinds of presses. I can't believe how vibrant the ancient book illustrations still are.

They were having a cultural festival in the main square with food tents, music, and activities. It was crowded. I got a falafel wrap from an Egyptian booth. Lots of river cruise groups. Surprisingly the old town was quiet.

I walked back along the river. It was hot but there was quite a bit of shade and a breeze. Many people picnic'ing on blankets along the river. Yesterday we saw volunteers for a Rhine cleanup went, trying to keep plastic out of the river.

I got back to the apartment about 2:30. Along the way I looked over locked gates into the elaborate P-patches (Kleingartens) that people can rent, often for many years.

About 4:30 we drove to the outdoor swimming complex. Two 50-meter pools plus a great kids area. Grass & trees for spreading blankets in the shade.

Vegetarian lasagna for dinner. Mathilda is such a happy child. She is obsessed with

watermelon.

Mathilda went to bed and Chris showed me an ultrasound wand that connects to his mobile phone. Amazing. He is teaching paramedics how to use them in ambulances.

They have a washer but no dryer.

Mon Sept 11

Said a sad goodbye to Sarah & Mathilda this morning as they biked off, Mathilda safely tucked into her little trailer wearing a helmet.

Chris looked at my genealogy and made some phone calls, since he can speak German. He did get a hold of an archivist in Kusel, who learned that Julius Gras was born Graff. The woman in Clausen didn't know anything beyond what is in the books I already have.

Chris drove me to the rental car company across town and helped me figure out how to use the car. I was nervous but all went well.

Nice roads, light traffic, clear signage. Arrived in Pirmasens at 12:15 and went straight to the grocery store. Bought a nice salad with bulgur, lentils, greens, and yogurt dressing, plus a hearty seed roll and a big apple. About €3.50.

Then drove to the tourist information center to find a bathroom and get hiking information. Then drove to the AirBnB, which turned out to be right across the street from the grocery store I went to.

I booked the small room, but they upgraded me to the bigger room. It's really nice. It's on the 4th floor, so I had to carry my suitcase up three

flights of stairs. The couple that owns the house is really sweet. Mohammad is from Bangladesh but has lived in Germany for 14 years. He speaks English well. His wife is Moroccan and speaks English. They have a beautiful one-month-old baby girl. The guest staying in the smaller room is a Nigerian who is working at the nearby US Army Medical Logistics Center, a kind of place I hadn't even known existed.

I drove about 20 minutes on small roads to the Hexenklamm (Witches' Gorge) hiking trail near the town of Gersbach. It was a little confusing finding the trail, though the parking area was well marked. I met a nice older German man who spoke English and explained about the trail. He excitedly showed me the pictures he had taken, which turned out to be very helpful so I could tell I wasn't lost.

It was 88° today, and 86° when I started hiking at 4:30. It was cooler in the forest. There were some bugs and I got a few mosquito bites.

The first part of the trail was narrow and wild and dropped down into the gorge. Water trickling from ferny rocks, a stream, and some witches as well. One of them had a skirt full of donations (to avoid hexes) and no one had stolen the coins!

The trail is about 4 miles and took about 2 hours. Delightful. The rest of the trail is on gravel road past pastures, cows, old barns, chickens, stacks of firewood,

and then back into the forest. The last part is through open farmland and flower meadows. Glad I did that part last when it wasn't so hot!

Saw several large stands of invasive knotweed. Heard an owl hooting. The trail markers (green witch on broomstick) were easy to follow.

Back at the trailhead a Belgian couple in a camper was sitting at the picnic table. We had a nice chat. I ate my apple.

I got back to the room at 6:45 and had a protein bar. I didn't need a real dinner. Took a bath/shower, did some laundry, and lots of computer chores. The room is really nice, with a big comfortable bed, lots of pillows in all sizes and thicknesses, a pretty comfortable chair, good light, and windows that open. It's on a busy road but the noise isn't bad up here.

Tues Sept 12

Since there's no fridge here, it's handy popping over to the store several times a day. Black cherry yogurt and granola this morning (real cherry chunks, not sweet). The checkers are down. Laborers stocking up on Rockstar and snacks. I also grabbed a salad for lunch.

At the tourist information office in Rodalben, an adorable (perky + cute) young woman told me her dad grew up in Texas but was "too lazy" (his words) to speak English with her. But her English was great. She gave me maps & brochures of the

area, and the name of a local history book available on Amazon.

Clausen was a quiet place. The town hall is by appointment only, and the mayor never responded to my emails. There is a wagon museum that could be interesting, but also by appointment only, and the TI lady doubted they would speak English. Most of my ancestral houses have been torn down, replaced by plain stucco. The couple that are older are not original. All of the ancestral houses are right in the center of town, so not surprising that the town has expanded since then.

Starting to cloud over but still a very warm day. Chris sent me a video of it pouring in Mainz - I got so lucky with the weather!

I drove to Gräfenstein Castle in Merzalben. A short hike up to this partially-ruined medieval forest perched on a sandstone knob. Great view of town and vast expanses of forest from the top of the tower. On the walk up I saw a tiny frog, perhaps a prince under a spell.

Next I drove to Petersberg. I have no info about exactly where my ancestors lived, but it's a tiny town on the sides of a valley. A woman asked if I was lost and luckily understood enough English for me to explain what I was doing there. Windmills on the hill and many houses have solar panels.

I'm guessing these smaller towns are bedroom communities for larger towns in the area.

Turns out my rental car (MG EHS) is a plug-in hybrid. It "helps" me drive, which takes some getting used to. I can feel the steering wheel pulling. It also displays the speed limit (much of the time), which is great!

Back to my room at 2 for snack, chores, short nap. Then I drove 15 minutes to another hike called Teufelspfad (Devil's Path). Heavy traffic in town but the hike was in a quiet forest. Ivy-covered trees at the beginning, alas. ~~Best~~ Then I climbed up to the ~~on~~ fern-draped sandstone formations. No one else on the trail. Hiked for about two hours, all in the forest. Lovely place.

I had grabbed a sunflower-poppy seed roll and some Camembert triangles, which made a great dinner. About 8:00 Mohammad knocked on my door with a tray of food: a bowl of homemade soup with garbanzos + pasta, a small tomato-cucumber-lettuce salad, a hardboiled egg, a banana, and four Italian prune plums! I was not hungry and wasn't sure what to do. It seemed too wasteful to flush the soup and salad, so I ate those and saved the rest for morning.

To bed at 10:30.

Wed Sept 13

So many Muslim women in long robes and hijab, even in the heat. Today is cooler though, with clouds but no rain. Didn't want food since I had that late meal, so I packed up, grabbed

yogurt & € bread for later, and hit the road for Kusel about 8. €1 for a hearty sunflower seed roll and a container of yogurt seemed very cheap.

Beautiful road to Kusel; roads are in good condition and well signed.

Easy parking in Kusel and a nice tourist info office with enough English and a few brochures in English. Google Translate camera makes it easy to read brochures and signs in German.

I followed the walking tour through the charming town. First on a forested walking path, where a German Shepherd on a leash lunged and growled at me and the woman owner could barely control him. I could feel the wind behind my knees!

Old town is charming, with 19th century buildings and cobbled streets. Had kirsch (cherry) strudel at a bakery. Crust was dry and boring but the filling was nice, not sweet. The town hall carillon was supposed to play at 12:12 but never did. The history museum was closed. I easily spent four hours and left at 1. Drove to nearby Castle Lichtenberg, which is beautiful, and surrounded by green fields, forests, and little towns. Melted Camembert (warm car) delicious on my roll for lunch.

A school group of ~11 year olds was scampering around the castle grounds excitedly, on what looked like a scavenger

hunt for information. A group of girls asked me something in German. I said (in German), I'm sorry, I don't speak German. English? said one. Then she said, "Can you say us the [points to wrist]?" They wanted to know the time, and kids still know about wrist watches. Though I guess with Apple watches that makes sense...

Parts of the castle are beautifully restored, and there is a café, youth hostel, and museums.

I went to the musikantland museum and learned about the musicians from this area who traveled the world, and probably influenced mexican music.



On to tiny Rammelsbach, population 1600. (Kusel is about 5000.) Google maps is able to pronounce German street names correctly. This is also a charming town, with a green park + pond, an old train station, lots of old houses, green hills with sheep and hay (and tall windmills), tractors in town, and a cafe. I climbed up a steep street for a better view and noticed a sign saying there is a trail around the town. Germany has walking paths everywhere!

By afternoon the sky cleared, the sun came out, and it got warm but not hot.

Grabbed a heart-shaped gingerbread at the cafe (lebkuchen). Had to try it while in the area, but it was dry & chewy. Gingery though, and not too sweet.

Back to my room at 5. At 6 I walked into Pirmasens, about 20 minutes, to see the main square (Exercierplatz) and the beautiful old post office. Back at 7~~8~~ for shower. Lots of new construction in town but also many beautiful old buildings. Population 40k. Nice stairs to get up the hill from town, and quiet back streets.

Siham and Mohammad invited me for dinner at 9 pm! I said I'd love to come visit but I didn't need any food. Of course they served me a big bowl of delicious meat balls and said it was OK to not finish it. I ate two. I hope they can use the rest with my germs... Siham also made Moroccan bread, called khobz. Chewy, fluffy round discs. She is from Safi, north of Essouira. Mohammad said he "imported" her from Morocco, but I'm not sure how they met. I got to hold the baby :)

They said that Pirmasens was a dying town until a few years ago, and now there are many immigrants from Syria, Algeria, Ukraine, etc. Germany has a skilled worker shortage. Mohammad's master's degree was free! They were marveling at how the baby "sings" when she eats.

Thurs Sept 14

Pack, load, grab yogurt & bread, on the road at 8. A little traffic in a few places, but mostly it was a pretty easy 95-minute drive. At the gas station I had to figure out how to open the gas door and then how to pay. I spent \$68 on gas for 3 days doing quite a bit of driving. You fill first & then pay - what a concept.

I paid extra for an automatic transmission - it's been almost 50 years since I drove a stick shift - and the cost was I think \$188.

I got to the platform early after dropping the car off, and was able to catch the train to Frankfurt 30 minutes early. Only a 30-minute ride. They (Deutschban = DB) canceled my train to Dusseldorf, so I stopped at the DB office to ask which train I should take and there was one leaving in 30 minutes. Only 75 minutes to Dusseldorf as we whizzed along at high speed.

There I waited maybe 45 minutes for the train to Erkelenz, and 40 quick minutes later I stepped off to find Julia and Louis waiting for me with a "Welcome Karen" sign. I got all choked up!

It's been 11 years since Julia came to visit. A lot has happened in her life: her parents both died, she had Louis, and Louis's dad left them. So she is a single mom with no support except friends, and it's really hard.

Back to German trains. My ears popped when we went through tunnels - interesting. Germans complain about trains being canceled & late, but

from my perspective they are amazing. There are so many trains and you can anywhere pretty quickly and easily. I don't think we have anything close in the US.

Julia has a nice one-bedroom apartment with a big main room and green grass outside. She gives Louis the bedroom and she sleeps on a comfortable pullout couch in the living room (which I am sleeping on while I'm here).

We went for a nice walk around the neighborhood with Mowgli, her brother's dog (she is babysitting while her brother is ill). Louis zoomed along on his pedal-free Puky. We stopped for a while at the playground with a flower meadow. There are nice walking paths all over.

Julia is a good cook and made a German style cheesecake. Light & fluffy, not heavy like our cheesecake, it's made with quark, which is sort of a cross between cottage cheese & sour cream. Delicious.

We went to a typical German restaurant in Wegberg for schnitzel smothered in sauteed onions, smoked trout, and fried potatoes. Everything was delicious. The place felt old-fashioned and authentic. Old guys playing cards & drinking beer, locals eating.

Louis was exhausted - he got up at 5 this morning because he was so excited to have company, then went to preschool all day. At the restaurant he could barely keep his eyes open, but never got whiny. At one point

Dusseldorf

45

he got up, went over to the waitress/owner, and asked "When will my food be ready?" When it came, he devoured a huge plate of fishsticks. We also had small green salads with mayonnaise for dressing! The smoked trout was really good. €55 total, €60 with tip.

Friday Sept. 15

Julia's brother is very sick, so she is taking care of his dog, Mogli. He's a sweet lab mix, but she is trying to find it a new home.

It's a lovely walk to Louis' preschool. He gave me a tour. It's a very nice facility, and they cook healthy meals for the kids in their kitchen.

Julia and I had yogurt, muesli, and fruit for breakfast. I tried physalis, also called ground cherry or cape gooseberry. They look exactly like a small orange tomatillo and have a sweet citrusy tang. Also "kiwi berries", miniature kiwi fruit. Grocery stores give away old produce and outdated items instead of throwing them away. It's called food sharing, and Julia gets a lot of new things to try, like the physalis.

Julia went to the doctor and then we drove about 30 minutes into Dusseldorf. We went to the open air market in Carlsplatz, with beautiful but expensive fruits, veggies, meats, cheeses, and pastries. A feast for the eyes. We walked around the beautiful old town; went into St. Lambertus church, where we saw amazing art treasures

and heard ethereal flute music; and walked along the Rhine River. The morning had a fall crispness in the air, but it warmed up to 73° and was the most perfect weather day possible! Parking was $\text{€}12$ for about 2 or 3 hours. Dusseldorf is an expensive city. It's the state capital. Lots of beautiful old & new things to look at. We brought sandwiches to eat on a bench by the river.

On the way back, Julia took me to Waldniel to see her old high school. This town is also the site of the Kent School for disabled children, where the Nazis euthanized the kids... Then she drove me to the house where she grew up, in Elmpf. She told me about the open pit coal mining that is displacing people in nearby Tagenau. We saw fields of asparagus, corn, and red & green cabbage.

Back at home we took the dog for a long walk. There are so many beautiful green trails here! We met a German-American who lived in Portland for years. It was fun to talk to her.

Louis came home about 4:15. For dinner we had abendbrot: breads, cheese, meats, vegetables, leftover schnitzel and smoked trout, and quark. It's a soft white cheese, a little bit tangy, that you can spread on bread. It's good with herb salt.

I'm starting to understand more German. I keep having to remind Louis that I don't understand most of what he says. We played

cards and trains.

Julia struggles with being a single mom with no family support, but she is a really great mom. Her house is a bit cluttered but pretty clean. Her rent is only €435/month including gas and water.

Sat Sept. 16

Louis watched an episode of *Bake Squad*, a cooking show where they make elaborate cakes. It's dubbed in German. Baking shows (or cooking) seems like a cool choice for kids.

We drove to Burg Linn, about 30 minutes away. There's a chance that von Derlinns came from here prior to 1691, when Conradus was born in Petersberg.

There was a wedding taking place in the courtyard, outside the castle, and a small children's birthday party in the inner courtyard. Otherwise it was quiet there, no crowds. We climbed the tower and saw the bones of Otto von Linn. He can't be our ancestor because his descendants died out in the 1200s. He or his ancestors did give their name to the town of Linn, and that is quite possibly where our ancestors lived before migrating south to Petersberg and Clausen.

While Louis played on the playground I checked out the charming, tiny, well preserved town of Linn and the archeology museum. The ~~it~~ was ice cream. My hazelnut was

fabulous. On the way back we drove through Krefeld, a large and somewhat gritty city, to see where Julia worked as a nurse at the hospital, and where Peter grew up, and played music in bars. It does have pedestrian streets, and a fancy shopping street.

Home at 4:15. Louis' una (grandma) picked him up at 5 for a sleepover. She is Louis' dad's mother. Julia doesn't really like her, but wants Louis to have a grandparent in his life. she's a tattoos & cigarettes, rough around the edges narcissist. Reibekuchen potato pancakes for dinner with applesauce and brown bread. It rained for a minute.

I don't see any evidence for an urban-rural political divide in Germany, which means you can live in a small town and not be surrounded by conservatives (not an option in the US).

Walked about 30 minutes into the center of Wegberg to a Saturday night town fundraiser with music, beer, and food. The band was great, playing a fun selection of covers. Two good vocalists. Two acoustics, acoustic bass, and guy on a drum box.

We saw three chubby muskrats grazing on the stream bank.

Sun Sept 17

Rain in the night but supposed to be a dry, warm day. Louis was at grandma's so Julia and I drove to Holland to see her

Roermond

49



Museum Burg Linn

Einzel Erwachsene RM

Preis: 5,00 €

16.09.2023 11:18 Kasse 2 Re

043987 Druck und System: BeckerBillet Hamburg (0422)

dad's grave. First she took me to Roermond, a beautiful small town with overflowing pots of flowers and a central square with old buildings that look like Amsterdam. I don't know how to describe the Dutch architectural style, but it's different from Germany. Tall, colorful, wooden buildings with steep gables. I think there are more bikes than cars. Lots of older people riding bikes; few people wear helmets.

Many Germans come to Holland to buy plants and flowers, and coffee, which is cheaper (less than \$5/pound for whole beans).

Julia loves a local specialty called matjes brötchen. Not knowing what it was, I told her to go ahead and order me one. Turns out it's soused herring (basically salted raw fish) on a white roll with lettuce; no sauce, and I passed on the raw onions. I took one bite and gagged. I tried, but could not eat it. I gave the fish to Mogli.

We went to the cemetery to see where Peter is

buried. It's a natural cemetery where they let you inter bodies and ashes without urns or caskets. Peter's wood marker has gone back to the earth and the forest has grown around the site. Other sites have earthen mounds decorated with cones, sticks, or rocks. It's a beautiful, peaceful place with paths through the forest. Out front is an area paved with flat rocks, ^{each} with a name inscribed. Each section has a year label. In Germany you are not allowed to do natural burials, or to keep ashes at home.

We picked Louis up at grandma's. He was sleep deprived and hungry. He cried a lot when he came home, and ate a lot. Then he felt better. I went for a long walk along the stream, and then we had a nice meal of salad, reibekuchen, bread, and other abendbrot stuff. Louis ate potato pancakes with thin sliced meat and applesauce spread on top. He snarfed it right down. He is a good eater! Not at all picky.

Today I saw a civil police (unmarked) car pull someone over by waving a paddle out the window.

Mon Sept. 18

Louis slept until 7! He calls me "muesli ^{macher}" because I make him muesli with yogurt + fruit for breakfast. I called him "muesli esser" (eater). Julia left me alone

Cologne

51

with Louis for 20 minutes while she took Mowgli for a walk. It makes me a little nervous because he and I can't communicate very well, but my German is getting better, and we managed OK.

We dropped Mowgli (Mogli) off at a woman's house, drove to Erkelenz, and took the train to Cologne (changing in Rhedt). It took a little over an hour. My round trip ticket cost €27. It was overcast with a cold wind.

When we got off the train and stepped out of the station, the cathedral was right there! It is massive, magnificent, lacy, brooding, Gothic. Two spires soar high into the sky. There are flying buttresses, gargoyles, and every inch seems to be covered in filigree. Incredible that it was possible to build something like this 800 years ago.

First we climbed the spire (€6 each). 533 spiral steps. It was surprisingly easy, except the open steps at the last part, which were a bit scary for me. Louis did the whole climb without a single complaint. The other climbers were amazed. 2/3 of the way up you can stop to see the enormous bells. Wonderful view from the top, of the Rhine River, the city, and other parts of the cathedral.

Inside the cathedral, a small ensemble of young people - looked like high school students - was practicing ethereal songs, probably to perform at mass. Beautiful. The interior of the cathedral is stunning & surreal. Incredible art treasures, some 1000 years old. The glass windows are so colorful. Everywhere you look is something worthy of awe.

Louis was bored, but hopping on the city tour train cheered him right up. For €10 we got a 45-minute

tour of the city. It didn't wow me. Louis was a huge hit everywhere we went. He's so cute and outgoing. Everyone falls in love with him.

We had ice cream cones. Black currant for me, tart, refreshing, delicious, and only €2. The sun came out and it was a warm day, with some strong gusts of wind.

I took one last quick spin around the inside of the cathedral while Louis finished his ice cream (and got to sit in a police car!).

Tour groups now use headsets, so the guide can talk quietly and everyone can set their own volume. It's a big improvement over the old days when guides would talk loudly to be heard.

We arrived in Cologne at 11:30 and caught the 4:00 train back to Erkelenz. Julia was tired from juggling two languages for the past four days!

We picked Mogli up, and chatted with the very nice people who watched him. They are friends of friends who volunteered to help out - Julia didn't even know them before today.

A nice couple a bit older than me. He is British and so friendly. Wanted to chat in English. Showed me the "typical German house" garden (backyard), long & narrow, with a shed in the back, a patio, grass, a bunny, and a cat. We declined coffee and a longer chat because Louis was tired. They gave Louis books, chalk, and candy, and tried to give him an easel, but it wouldn't fit in the car.

Before we picked up Mogli we made a quick grocery stop. Louis and I went to the playground across the street.

It was almost seven by the time we got home and we had sandwiches and reibekuchen for dinner. Louis was overtired and melted down a bit, but went to sleep easily.

A brief thunderstorm rolled through. Julia began making rotkuhl ("apple cabbage"), which needs to simmer for a long time.

Tues Sept 19

We walked Louis to school. A chilly wind blowing. At 9 we left to go visit Julia's brother, Sebastian, who is 7 years older. He is in treatment for Tourettes Syndrome. He was very happy to see his dog. He is thin, smokes, & does not look healthy. He's very nice though. His tics were not bad today. Julia says he's immeasurably better on the new medication. We went for a two-hour walk through a forest and had meatloaf sandwiches at the canteen at the hospital after that. They were good though salty. It was almost an hour drive each way. Julia tailgates in her tiny Hyundai, which makes me nervous.

We did some shopping (protein bars & yogurt for me), then picked up Louis, and came back to the apartment. Julia cooked me a German going-away feast: beef goulash with mushrooms, rotkuhl (red cabbage with onion & apple), and knödel (boiled potato dumplings). I loved the

goulash & rotkul but the dumplings were too gooey for me. I had fun playing with Louis while she cooked.

We all went for a long walk and stopped at a playground. It was a good last day.

I showed Julia the trick of wrapping lettuce in damp paper towels and storing in an airtight bag so it keeps longer. She was thrilled.

The brown coal open pit mine here is displacing villages. They buy you out, then build a new village nearby. The signs list the village name and (neu) for new. Julia says the new villages have no soul, and it's really hard for people to leave houses and land that has been in their family for generations. I saw one of the villages from a distance. The houses looked more like a subdivision than a village.

Wed. Sept. 20

My train was canceled and Julia helped me make a new plan: Erkelenz to Rheydt to Cologne (Köln) to munich. The train was 35 min. late. I left Erkelenz at 8 am and arrived in munich at 2:35. I missed my connection to Villach. Oops, I'm getting ahead of myself.

Louis had to be awakened at 6:15 to get me to the train station, so he was a tired boy. He still managed to run my big

Train to Austria

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suitcase all the way to the car. A pink sunrise and another beautiful day with no wind.

It was a sad goodbye at the train station in Erkelenz. ^{from Cologne I took an ICE high speed train.} There were many empty seats on the train. I had a window seat and a tray table. I ate a quark bar in Erkelenz, but was very ready for my yogurt + granola by the time I got seated at 10 am. There was some stress + confusion at the Cologne station. The train wasn't listed on the board. I didn't see the Info booth on the platform so I ran down to the main info booth and waited in line, certain I was going to miss my train. The guy told me the train was leaving from that unmarked platform in 2 minutes. So I ran to the platform, up the stairs carrying my suitcase. Still nothing on the display board. Then I saw the info booth, where a helpful person, said to stay near her and she would let me know when + where the train would arrive, once she knew. It ended up being 25 minutes late arriving, leaving Cologne. This time I wisely asked where my wagon was, so I could get to my reserved window seat.

ICE (intercity express) trains are high speed (up to 300 mph) and long distance. RE (regional express) trains go between ~~large~~ smaller cities with more stops. I took an RE to Rheydt and then to Cologne, and an ICE to Munich. The inevitable delays are a problem when you have connections! There's a DeutschBahn joke that says if you are late and miss your train, don't worry, just catch the earlier train because it was probably delayed.

After Frankfurt the train switched direction and I was facing backward. I got a seatmate

in Wurzburg.

Train traffic is heavy around big stations and can cause delays.

Saw solar farms, and a nuclear reactor.

Side note: they have wonderful windows in Germany that either tilt inward from the top, or swing inward from side hinges, depending on which way you turn the handle.

In Munich I went to the DB office to reschedule my trains to Ljubljana, since I got here too late to catch my scheduled train. It was very organized. They give you a number, there are a lot of agents, and it goes quickly. For some reason he said I had to pay for the ticket from Villach to Ljubljana, but could get that reimbursed, along with my hotel cost in Villach. He gave me the form & envelope. We'll see if I can figure it out.

I caught EC (Euro City) 219 at 4:16, to Salzburg. It was warm on the train, but lots of empty seats. I soon had my first views of the Alps! Bavaria really is green slopes, fat cows, overflowing flower baskets, and Heidi houses, backed by tall mountains.

1 hr. 45 minutes to Salzburg, I ran to platform 2 and made the Villach train with 4 minutes to spare. The train only had a few cars and was full with a few people standing.

I brought sandwiches from Julia's - one for lunch and one for dinner.

Jagged granite peaks, glacial flow river,

Villach Austria

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tunnels, tall conifers, steep valleys, sunset. Dark at 7:30. The scenery is very North Cascades, but with more towns and lots of power lines and towers.

The train made many stops. Arrived in Villach at 8:45 after a 2.5-hour journey. My butt was sore!

In Munich I had booked a last-minute AirBnB, \$91! I hope DB reimburses. It was the cheapest thing I could find near the station. It was a short walk on a pedestrian street. Still many people eating at outdoor tables at 9 pm. It's a warm evening.

The AirBnB is creepy. It said it was a room in someone's home, but it's more like a hotel, with shared bathrooms and common areas. The guy who greeted me was not the host, didn't speak much English, and made me a little nervous. Terrible teeth. The rooms sleeps 3, which may explain the price. It has no window or air flow and is stuffy. I went for a short walk to stretch my legs, but didn't really like the vibe of the town.

Train lessons learned: they are very often late, so build in lots of connection time!

Thurs Sept 21

Awake at 5:15, walk to the station at 6. The town was dark, quiet, and empty. There's a nice trail along the river. The train was there

so I was able to board early. All of the seats were in enclosed compartments with six seats and a door. You have to put your suitcase on a high overhead rack, and I couldn't lift mine that high! There was an older man who helped me. There were three British girls as well, ~~later~~ and a young German woman. The compartment was stuffy with the door closed, but nice with it open.

We left the station on time. It was just getting light. Beautiful pink sunrise. Some clouds, and at one point we were in the clouds. But mostly it was nice weather.

The British girls got off and I had a nice chat with the German woman, who spoke excellent English. She was going from Cologne, where she lives, to Ljubljana to give a keynote speech at a conference for HR professionals. Her topic was how can companies help achieve the UN sustainability goals. She occasionally comes to a conference in Seattle and I invited her to visit. She works one week a month in Bled, Slovenia. We stopped at the Bled train station. It's at 500 meters.

This was a slower train, so it was easier to get pictures. Saw farms, old towns, forests, rushing rivers, plastic-wrapped hay bales.

There were no station announcements. The trip took just under two hours. Arrived at the Ljubljana station at 8:15.

My friend Donald Reindl met me at the station and drove me to their apartment in the Rožna Dolina neighborhood. They own what we could call a condo in a 4-plex. It's 4 bedrooms and one bath. He teaches linguistics at the university and owns a translation business. Dawn teaches (mostly music) at the European school, as well as private lessons, and helps with the translation business. They have three daughters: Christina (14), Klara (21) both still at home; and Erica (24) who lives in the US and has a baby girl.

Don drove me one hour south to Moselj (pronounced mozel), where my second great grandparents Ferdinand + Magdalena Erschen are buried.

Don helped me order a 5x7 stainless steel plaque to epoxy to the plinth. It says, "Left by their GG Granddaughter Karen Story Seattle WA Sept. 2023." It will let people know that someone still cares about the grave, plus anyone who wanted to contact me could find me online. It's a beautiful small cemetery, well maintained, with many polished granite vaults that are easy to open and add new urns (most people here are cremated).

In the tiny town of moselj, next to the cemetery, we saw the old school, church, parish office, and fire station. Don asked at the fire station if anyone had a key to the church. He sent us to a nearby house where one of the church ladies lives. Her name is Dragitsa and she is one of the people who takes care of the church, cleaning, arranging the altar cloths, planting flowers. It's a small congregation & attendance is dwindling.

There is a priest shortage. She took us to the church and proudly showed us around. It's unornamented on the outside, with plain stucco walls, but the inside is jaw dropping. There are medieval frescoes, gold-painted Baroque altar & chapel pieces, a medieval slate floor. The church was founded in 1509! It's called St. Lenart. After WWII many German churches were destroyed. Four men protected this church day & night. Many German cemeteries were also destroyed, and it is very lucky that the Erschen grave was not.

Dragitsa is 72 and is from Bosnia originally. She was so friendly! She invited us for drinks but we politely declined. Donald said we would have been there for hours. She gave me a hug. And a booklet with church history.

Next we saw an old chapel ruins. It was called Precious Blood, was destroyed after the war, and is now a monument to WWII victims.

In Kočevje (pron. Ko chay wee ye), a town of 8000, we had lunch at a restaurant called Veronika. I had bean soup and sausage (good not great). Lunch for two was 15 euros. The owner was very friendly and chatty and seemed to love speaking English.

Then we went to the regional museum to see the exhibit on "The lost cultural heritage of the Gotscheer Germans." Gotschee is pronounced Go shay. The exhibit was also in English and had lots of great old pictures

and information.

Next we saw the Kočevje cathedral, which is ~~really old~~ and it's beautiful inside. It has a covered altar and an altar screen which both have German inscriptions, which are rare to see in churches here.

Then we visited the Trata Church, ^{actually} ~~or~~ the Corpus Christi church in the Trata neighborhood. It was a cemetery that is now a memorial with a plaque in German.

There is more about all of these places online and I took many photos.

Then we drove out to Jama pod Kenom in the Kočevje forest, one of the mass graves where thousands of people were executed and thrown into limestone caverns during and after WWII. This is history I had never heard before and it is a big deal in Slovenia. Up to 100,000 murdered men in nearly 600 sites! There is a beautiful memorial in the forest, a chapel, wood carvings, and memorials among the moss-covered boulders. Haunting and beautiful!

In Slovenia, as in most of Europe, all land, including private, is public access. You can pick berries & mushrooms, but you can't hunt or collect wood. There are bears & lynx out here. Sustainable logging. The forest is huge.

Our last stop was at Željske Cave, but we didn't have time for the 40-minute round trip. Magdalene's father was from Željske. Today we also drove through Dolga Vas, where Pauline was born.

Back to house at 6. I met Dawn, who had been

working all day. She's really nice! We had a delicious dinner of oven-baked pesto-chicken-cheese sliders and steamed veggies. It was so fun having a family dinner with Don, Dawn, and their two kids. I really like them all.

Don brought me a pile of Gottschee books to peruse. They gave me a really nice room, which is usually Don's (I'm not sure where Dawn sleeps). I feel a little funny about this... (Turns out I've kicked them both out of their room!)

Friday Sept 22

The bathroom here is busy, with five people using it! Dawn and Christina left for school at 7. I walked into town about 9. Perfect weather: warm, partly cloudy. Their neighborhood is quiet and attractive, with trees and a variety of house types. It takes about 30 min. to walk to the city. I went on a forested trail through Tivoli Park, then into the city. There are 280,000 people, but it feels like a small city. There wasn't a lot off traffic, and it's pretty quiet, especially in the pedestrianized center.

It's a beautiful city! Cobblestone streets, old buildings, a river with cafes + promenade, a castle on a hill, beautiful old architecture.

I walked up the trail to the castle and paid a little over €8 to go into the

tower (climb it) and see the well done history video. By noon it started getting busy and I headed down the hill.

Bought a salad at Spar and ate it in the warm sun on one of the many bridges over the river. I walked along the river, checking out the Dragon Bridge (with great dragon sculptures) and the Butcher's Bridge (covered in locks).

Got windy and threatened to rain, so I popped into St. Nicholas church to ogle the pink marble, gilt, and magnificent choir stalls. Another gorgeous interior. They were playing men chanting over the speakers, which set the mood. My back was sore today so I did some stretching.

The rain stopped and I continued walking through the enticing old town. Photos calling out at every turn.

Donald suggested sending a postcard to Dragice, which I thought was a great idea, so I went to a post office and mailed her a Seattle postcard.

Back to the house at 4. Donald made delicious thin crust pizza for dinner. Clara showed me some of her menagerie. She raises two kind of rats to sell and has several kinds of snakes. Dawn and I bonded over African fabric + music, and she went off to an R&B/Jazz concert with one of the singers from the Slovenian band Laibach (they inspired Ramstein).

I was invited to come with them to pick grapes, which I would have enjoyed, but a) it got postponed due to rain, and b) I don't have time. I checked weather for Piran, Bled, and Ptuj, and Piran looks

best, so that's where I'll go first. I booked hostels in Piran & Bled (Bohinj was full). No hostel in Ptuj and the cheapest available room is €88 per night. I'll only be there 2 nights.

Sat Sept 23

Don made blueberry pancakes and all of us (except Kristina) had a nice conversation about all sorts of things. They are educated and interesting people.

While I packed I overheard them having a family meeting about getting a hamster to add to the menagerie. I was impressed with the conversation, in which sanity prevailed (no more animals) without the parents ever actually saying no.

It started raining hard, so Donald kindly drove me to the bus station. I got there at 9 and the bus left at 10:10. I saw one crowded bus turning people away and was worried, so I got in line as soon as the bus pulled up at 9:40. The driver locked up while he took a break, so I and a few other people waited in the rain. Luckily I had been able to put my suitcase in the hold so it didn't get soaked.

Turns out there were plenty of seats on the bus. The first one I took had a drip, even though it was a nice bus.

No bathroom on the bus, but I made it OK.

It only cost €2,70 to Piran, just over 2 hours!

At first they were playing Slovenian pop, the first I've heard. 63° in Ljubljana. Dan says the seasons are like clockwork, with Fall starting on Sept. 23 (today).

It's a nice 4-6 lane road, good condition, good infrastructure. The rain stopped at 11.

We are very close to Italy. Scenery nothing special.

Our first stop was Koper, at 11:30. McDonalds here and everywhere. They advertise plant burgers. Lots of tunnels on the way to the coast.

Next stop Isola. Now we're on the water! Lots of sailboats in the marina. Oleander blooming! It's warm & sunny. It feels like a typical seaside town, and also reminds me of Mexico: I saw a jardin with a gazebo. Plane trees line the roads. Many campers & trailers. There's a campground here. 18° C in Ljubljana, 23° at the coast. Vineyards, Italian Cypress - it looks Mediterranean!

Next stop Strunjan. Winding headland road, narrow, lots of traffic - it's the weekend. Then Lucia, which feels like a seaside resort. There are casinos. Then Portoroz. We arrived in Piran at 12:15. If you want to drive your car into town you have to pay. There is a parking garage with a free shuttle into town.

Adriatic hostel was a very short walk, up a narrow street. Check-in didn't open until 2, so I sat at the table in the nice kitchen and perused the map of town.

There's a grocery store just a block away, so I ran down and got yogurt + a peach and had breakfast for lunch (since I'd had pancakes + peanut butter - effectively a PB sandwich - for breakfast).

At 2 I checked in to room 2, bed D. There are two bunks. I'm on a top. I hope I can get out of bed in the night without waking others, or falling! There are two flights of stairs with no railings. The WC is one flight down.

They have a washing machine here - with soap! - so I can have clean smelling shirts. I started a load, then took a shower.* I met one of my dormmates, Margaret from Holland.

She is beautiful and friendly, looks to be in her 30s, traveling solo for the first time. I got bit by something yesterday, through my shirt, and here something bit my ankle. Time for socks! It's 76° here, partly cloudy, perfect.

*First standup shower since Berlin. Nice hot water.

I got two grocery store salads for dinner. The quinoa with beans, corn, olives, + pickled onions was great.

I did not like the kamut with greens and whole garlic cloves (surprise!).

Met a guy named Chris from Stanwood WA. He's been hiking all over and gave me some tips.

Walked to the TI to get a walking map. The street names are also in Italian. It's a charming town, a maze of narrow alleys. Walking to the lighthouse to watch the sunset, I ran into Kari & Galen Page! what are the chances? They were with a couple who lives in the Highlands. They've been sailing and are now headed to the Dolomites for hiking. So fun to see them.

I stepped on the only usb cord I brought and broke it. Hope the stores are open on Sunday! Just as I got back to the hostel it started pouring rain.

Sunday Sept. 24

I slept for 10 hours! The rain stopped and it's supposed to be dry. The nearby grocery store is closed on Sundays, so I walked 20 min south along the coast to a small store for yogurt, cheese, & mayo. The promenade along here is nice. Fishermen, a pink sky, views of the Slovenian mountains including Triglav, the tallest. Swimming steps lead straight into the warm water. mini trucks picking up garbage, people sweeping the sidewalks.

At 9 I walked to the electronics store I found on Google maps. It's no longer there, but the guy said he'd sell me one of his personal cables. €10 seemed a bit greedy, but he said I'd never ~~find~~ one on

on a Sunday, and I really can't manage without it, so I am grateful. Then he offered me a glass of wine - at 9 am!

I followed the Piran walking loop up to St. George's church, whose bell tower is visible over the main square. From the churchyard you get a nice view of the town. It's quite windy.

I climbed steeply up to the old walls & ran into Chris, who is leaving today. He pointed out the city of Trieste, across the water.

Then I continued on the walking path, first along the coast. Lots of walkers & bicycles, it being Sunday. Olive & fig trees. Then I entered the Strunjan salt flats. They're shut down for the season, but they had a really nice interpretive center & film. It's part of Strunjan nt. Park.

I got a bit lost in Strunjan, which has a nice little beach. Then you climb up onto the cliff of Strunjan, on forest trails, to great views of the tallest cliff in the Adriatic. It was beautiful.

It started to sprinkle. Glad I had my rain jacket! I found my way down to the flats (you really have to search for the wayfinding signs sometimes). There's a stone tunnel 550 meters long. The lights create bands of color

that make it feel like you're inside a caterpillar. It was for trains and now is only ped's & bikes. Some parts of the loop walk (I did the Strunjan loop plus the Piran loop, for a total of 21 km) are trails, other parts on roads. Sometimes a narrow path turns out to also be for cars.

I got to Portoroz about 3 and needed to give my feet a break, so I had a pistachio ice cream cone - yum.

Back to the hostel at 4:30. At 5:30 I popped down to the 80s cafe for a mediocre €3 tuna melt. Back at the hostel, I sat in the kitchen to write in my journal, and met Florian from France, age 29. He is riding his bike to Japan!

Katje, the receptionist, let me switch to a bottom bunk - yay!

Mon Sept 25

Up at 6, store opens at 7 for breakfast stuff. Got a sunflower seed roll for my lunch sandwich. Then started walking to Seča to do the green loop walking trail. Blue sky & sunshine! The town is quiet. Hotels are bringing in beach chairs & swimming buoys. I think it's officially off season. Saw two young women wearing shirts that said, "A smile is a curve that sets things straight."

The walk along the promenade to Lucija was nice. Past an old salt warehouse and a marina. When I turned inland the path went up a hill into a quiet neighborhood. Then it dropped down to a busy road. I didn't like it, and wasn't sure I was on the right path, so I aborted and went back to the coast. This took me through Camp Lucija, a large campground with short & long-term stays. It has a nice bath block with showers & dish sinks, plus an RV dump station and water. There's even a little store. An adjacent full-service marina with hoists has many boats, and also little floating house boats with hot tubs on the decks; some of the units are for sale.

It got windy, but still sunny & warm. I took the bus from Lucija back to Piran. €1,50 and they take credit cards, no cash.

Ate my cheese & cucumber sandwich on the hostel terrace. Cukes are the perfect sandwich veggie. Unlike lettuce they don't get soggy & limp, and unlike tomato they don't drip or get the bread soggy. They add nice crunch. Little lizards were running in and out of the openings in the wall stones.

After lunch I walked to the tourist office to get the bus schedule for tomorrow. Then up to see the serene white cloister of St. Francis monastery and

peak into the church. Then up to the Town Wall, with a phenomenal view of the town. Entry was €3. There are several towers you can climb for higher views, with steep narrow stone or wood steps.

The Mediadom museum was closed on Monday. Back to the hostel for a short nap and a pastry from Mercator, the grocery store.

The woman at the tourist office, when she heard I was from Seattle, said, "Grunge city!" She loved Alice in Chains.

Veronika(?) at the reception says it's windy & cold here in the winter in Piran, and the town pretty much shuts down. Many people are seasonal residents.

Margaret left today and I have a new dormmate from Denmark.

I headed out to get dinner and sit in the sun. I tried the couscous salad. Better with cucumber and balsamic. I walked to the point. The wind had died down and people were swimming and sunbathing. The church there is magical. It's not in use and an artist hung gold sheets that ~~add~~ ~~are almost~~ are futuristic yet timeless.

Two days is the perfect amount of time here.

As I was brushing my teeth at 8pm, a beautiful young woman was in the bathroom getting all gussied up to go out. Age difference!

Today I saw ripe persimmons on trees. A lot of them are grown here.

Gambling isn't legal in Italy, so many people

Come to Slovenia. There are casinos in Portoroz.

I stayed up til about 9 chatting with the ~~Dutch~~^{anish} kid. He is a carpenter. In Denmark carpenters do both framing and finish work.

My throat felt a little irritated, and when I laid down I started coughing. I was worried that I was sick! I took a cough gel and slept propped up. No more coughing and I felt fine in the morning. Some loud guys came in at 3 am, talking & stomping.

Tues Sept 26

The garbage "trucks" are small electric vehicles that fit in the narrow alleys and make no noise.

At 9 I checked out & went to the bus station, to enjoy some last moments by the sea. There are benches facing the water. A lovely quiet morning with a soft sea breeze. Kids walking to school, commuters arriving by bike and bus. Two early tour busses arrived at 9:20.

met a recently-retired French guy who was dealing with culture shock because he spoke English with a heavy French accent and was having trouble with communication. His pack was heavy. He didn't think he could find transport through the Balkans to Greece, and was thinking of going back to Trieste and flying. I told him there was a train from Ljubljana to Zagreb, so he decided to go to

Ljubljana. I watched his pack while he went to get coffee. Then I dashed to the clean 50-cent WC across the street (the bus ride is 3 hours). No more weekend rate - the bus was €11.

The driver seemed impatient & irritated, throwing up his hands as if exasperated, but then he would laugh or smile. So body language here must be different.

The bus left on time at 10:15. We climbed up from the coast. This was the milk run bus through the countryside, not on the freeway, with more stops than the 2-hour bus. I liked getting to see the towns, villages, and fields. More mountain views today with the good weather. Winding roads with scenic pullouts. Picturesque green valleys.

The couple behind me were talking most of the trip, in Slovenian. It sounded like they were arguing, but then they'd laugh. So maybe it's a language with an edge to its sound?

many stacks of firewood. A logging truck. Donald told me that Slovenia is suitable for forests, and does a lot of sustainable logging, but isn't a good place for crops due to all the rocks.

As we drove through the prosperous, peaceful countryside, it's hard to imagine there was war here just 30 years ago.

The bus arrived in Ljubljana 5 minutes early, at 1:10. I dashed to the free WC in the train station and easily made the 1:30 bus to Bled. After being in Piran, it was kind of a shock to be in the city, with all the noise & hustle, 71° and sunny.

€5,70 to Bled. We passed a roadside shrine.

I was sad to see billboards in the country side. Lots of corn fields. Clouds snagging the mountain tops.

Kranj is a big city with lots of traffic. Cars are king here too. Donald told me that people who commute into Ljubljana are given a pay boost to pay for transit, but instead they use it to buy cars. Seems like it would be better to give them a bus card.

We picked up a lot of teens coming home from school. Braces and flirting and cell phones, just like teens everywhere!

Arrived in Bled just before 3. A little over 10 minute walk to the hostel. At first it seemed far from town, but it really isn't, and it's nice to be out of the town itself, which is mostly shops and hotels. It's a nice house with a garden. Tom, the owner, is super nice. He lives elsewhere with his girlfriend and two-year-old, but spends days here and is very hands on.

I'm in a room with 3 bunks. It's very nice, with reading lights, lockers, bedside tables, a kitchen with all the basics. It's very thoughtfully done. He gave me maps and directions to everything.

The closest store has very basic food, but I grabbed pesto and zucchini and made pasta for dinner. My dormmates are Sanne from Australia, Celina from Switzerland, (Shera) a woman from CA who says "dude" a lot, and two guys from Holland (one is Argentinian)

who came here to climb Mt. Triglav. They are leaving at 3 am for the 13-hour drive back to Holland.

I love that I am seeing so many young solo women travelers.

Tom says Bled is a ghost town in the winter. The lake used to freeze, but the last time was 7 years ago. It's only 1500 ft. elevation. It gets snow.

Everyone in the room went to bed early.

Wed. Sept. 27

Awake at 5:30. Start walking to the gorge at 7:15. A golden morning. Brisk air, clear sky, sun rising, the peaks visible. The walk to the gorge entrance is 45 minutes uphill on small roads & trails, past cows, farms, villages, old & new houses.

At the entrance to the gorge there was a cute quonset-hut-shaped outhouse. I bought my timed-entry senior ticket online for 7 euros & scanned it at the gate to enter. I arrived at 8, right when they opened. There was one person in front of me and a few behind, so I felt mostly alone. They say it gets crowded at 10. You walk one way, downstream, along a wooden boardwalk clinging to the rock face. It's absolutely gorgeous. It felt like being in that old computer game called Myst. Clear blue-green water, pools & drops. I tried to go slow and savor it. I spent 45 minutes and was sad to leave.

The hike back was initially uphill through a quiet forest. Few other hikers; most people drive to

the gorge. Then you start downhill on little roads past farms and villages. The sound of cowbells made me feel like I was in the Alps! This area is called the Julian Alps. Stopped to look in several churches. Janeza Krstnika was quite ornate.

Back to hostel at 10:15. I really like it here. It feels like living in a neighborhood in a home. Tom is super nice. He's in his late 40s I think, and has a 2½-year-old daughter. He inherited the house from his aunt. He used to live here, but he needed more space and moved to a smaller town 8 km away, with a view of Bled. He spends a lot of time at the hostel and does all the cleaning. We chatted about life in Slovenia: low taxes, low healthcare costs (≤ 50 a month covers everything), his daughter's birth (amazing midwives).

I've decided to stay here until Sunday, instead of going to Ptuj, so I canceled my booking there. That's going to save me over \$100 (two nights here cost less than one night there). Sat in the garden in the warm sun and ate my sandwich.

Walked into town. St. Martin's church - another gorgeous ornate interior, with tile(?) walls, stained glass, and amazing art works.

Then I began walking counter clockwise on the promenade / trail around the lake. I could hear screams of glee from the toboggan ride on the far shore. The first part of the path is paved and wide.

Horses trot by pulling tourist buggies. Smelly! Then I came to a bathing beach with docks. This is also a rowing center and a course on the lake marked by buoys. Other adventure activities include paragliding, ziplining, rowboats, stand up paddleboards, ziplining, and biking. There are hiking trails galore.

It was warm in the sun! As you walk around the lake the views keep getting more incredible. You see the island and church from all sides, with the castle + St. Martin's in the distance, and peaks towering above it all. The south side of the lake is more natural, with gravel trails along the shore, and welcome shade.

I walked up to the viewpoint at the Belvedere Cafe. Just below was another viewpoint with not another soul in sight.

As I got closer to town it got busy. The downtown park was filled with people. There are some big ugly hotels here. I found a shady bench away from the crowd and ate my snack.

I stopped at the store for a few things and saw they had cream cake (a local specialty) for €1,69. (The cafes charge €9!) Even though I'd already had a snack I bought a piece, as I was dying to try it. Thin pastry top + bottom, fluffy custard, a layer of whipped cream, + topped with powdered sugar (which I scraped off). Delicious, not sweet, and very filling (no dinner for me).

Back at the hostel at 3:30. Ate my cake, sat in the sun to journal, watched tractors putting past, saw a guy coming home with his horse + cart,

after hauling tourists.

Went for a short walk before dark. Almost full moon, alpenglow on the peaks, a big cemetery. Dark at 7:15.

High today 77°.

I took a shower and cut the top of my foot on the sharp, tall shower lip. Hope it won't affect walking. (It didn't.)

Note: the apples are good here (and in Germany). Crisp, even though they're not usually refrigerated.

Thu, Sept. 28

Caught the bus to Bohinj at 9:20. €3,30. It only went to the first stop, which worked out well. After getting directions from the info office, I walked to the nearby town of Stara Fuzina and followed maps. Me to the entrance booth, through the cute little town. As we approached Bohinj I could see fog wafting out of the valley. I was glad Sam warned me that this was normal. It burned off quickly. The bus ride took about 30 min.

In my walks the last two days I've seen a lot of shrines to Mary. I'm impressed with Slovenia: it's clean, has good busses, tidy towns & villages, many nice houses, good roads. Lots of colorful bee hives. Horizontal hay drying racks.

The bus arrived at 9. It was a bit

chilly (1700 feet) but soon warmed right up.

We're in the National Park & there are hikes everywhere. I headed for Mostnica Gorge. Free entrance with my Julian Alps card. It's a deep, narrow gorge with turquoise water & fancifully-eroded rock shapes. The trail was rough & rocky. Not too many people.

You can either do a loop and come down the other side of the gorge, or you can continue up a steep rocky trail to a small road & restaurant. Here you can see up the ^{Vojšček} Valley to rocky peaks - a breathtaking view. I opted to not continue up to the waterfall, and instead walked back down to Stara Fužina via the little road. It was so beautiful! The sound of cowbells only added to the charm. Stopped at a picnic table with spring water and a view. Chatted with a guy from Ireland. Watched paragliders floating down from the heights.

Back in Stara Fužina I found protein bars at the little market (which caters to hikers). Then found the trail around the lake. Another glorious warm sunny day! It's a gravel trail, a bit rocky, pretty empty. Saw some 10" fish near shore.

Started to get pressure pain on the top of one foot. Googled solutions. Good old REI came through. "Window lacing." Don't cross the laces over the sore spot. Worked like a charm.

A big group of cute little kids paraded past. Kind of a long, rough walk for them!

I walked the north shore of the lake to the ski lift, past a big campground. Donald suggested

the gondola if it was a clear day, and since it was, I decided to go for it, despite the cost (€26 senior rate!). The large gondola can hold 80 people. It rises 3100 feet in 4 minutes, from about 1700 to about 5000. It is very steep. It was terrifying. My legs were shaking when we got to the top. I was not looking forward to coming down! But the view was amazing. mt. Triglav with no clouds. At 9400 feet, it's the highest peak in Slovenia. Lake Bohinj far below.

I met a nice Swedish couple my age who are staying in the campground with their camper. They said it is crowded and there are a lot of hippies!

Coming down was less scary and seemed faster. The gondola was packed and I got right in the middle.

There is a bus stop just below the lift and it came one minute after I got there. €3,70 return, since I got the bus at the farther stop. 4:45 bus. I walked around 15 km. Shera got on the bus at the next stop. She was bummed because she dropped the hostel keys in the lake. She is going to Israel for 5 months to study dance on a grant. Pretty cool.

Pesto pasta with zucchini for dinner. Three new women in the dorm. Some guys clomping around upstairs.

Tom told me that he was 17 during the Slovenian Independence war, living here

Blejski grad / Bled castle

Vstopnica je opremljena s časovnim žigom in velja v izpisaniem terminu. Velja za en vstop.

Each ticket is time-stamped and is valid only for the date and time indicated. It's valid only for a single entry.

29. september 2023

KARTICA BLED

08:30

Cena / Price 13,50 EUR

Bled, 29. 09. 2023, 23-055644-002-001

Zavod za kulturo Bled, Cesta svobode 11, 4260 Bled

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Vstop na lastno odgovornost

Welcome!
Enter at your own risk

Datum nakupa: 29.09.23
23-055644-002-001



POVRATNA GONDOLA
SEN OR

Velja do / Valid until: 27.10.23
1 / 34340 28.09.23 / 15:14



9

in Bled. He said it wasn't scary at all, it was even a bit exciting. There were planes flying overhead, and anti-aircraft guns, but no bombs or fighting here.

Friday Sept. 29

I walked up a steep zig zag flight of stairs to the castle, arriving at 8:30. A robotic mower was cutting the grass! I used the free wifi and the audio tour, which was well done & interesting, though the numbers were hard to follow. The views were spectacular. The museum had some interesting period costumes & furniture. I learned that Vila Bled was Tito's summer home.

The first tour group arrived at. By the time I left, a little after 9:30, people were pouring in. A group of about 150 high school boys passed past me on the trail, many of them saying "Dobra dan" (hello), which seemed unusually polite to me.

I chatted with Carole from San Antonio, a woman a bit older than me traveling solo.

To get to the Ojstrica viewpoint you walk to the far end of the lake, past the rowing club & the campground. It's a steep rocky trail. The view is phenomenal.

People who go to the island church ring the "Wishing bell," so the bell rings pretty much non-stop all day. The morning light was not as good for lake photos (except at the viewpoint) so I'm glad I did the walk in the afternoon the first time. Purple crocus & cyclamen blooming.

The shade along the south side of the lake was most welcome. The Slovenian arts & crafts fair was disappointing. Only about 8 booths, and nothing traditional except honey & bee products.

I walked to the big tourist information center on the more busy & new south side of town. I decided not to try the free two-hour bike rental because the roads I would have to navigate were busy. They do provide helmets. They had a nice film about Mt. Triglav (pron. Triglaw), and the beauty of the Ntl. Park (aerial photography).

Picked up food for tomorrow at the big mercato store across the street and got cash at the ATM.

To get back to the hostel I found a path through a meadow along a stream, past farms. The path turned into a cart path and then joined the road by the hostel. An idyllic walk in the country. They built a new bypass road around the town, which did impact the neighborhood around the hostel. That must

have been hard for people.

After a pesto pasta dinner I went for a stroll up the hill through a couple villages. Families with kids on bikes & trampolines, nice houses and cars. From what I can see online, Slovenia is doing well economically, above the EU average.

Quite a few roofs have solar panels. Most houses have nice vegetable gardens. Saw people eating outside on this warm Friday night. Window boxes overflowing with brightly-colored flowers. Tractors pulling wooden trailers piled high with green - it's haying season. I love being able to walk from village to village.

Back at the hostel I chatted with Marta, a woman from northern Mexico who has been living in Ireland for 6 years. She doesn't want to go back to Mexico due to economics, politics, and femicide. She'll have her Irish passport in two years and can then live anywhere in Europe.

She hates Irish winters! She says it's already rainy there, so I'm glad I went early in my trip.

It's nice chatting with people in the room & hearing their stories. Marissa is a biomedical engineer who develops trans-catheter heart valves.

Elena from Ohio has a degree in psychology & film, which is a cool combination. She also has two enormous suitcases.

The French guy I met the other day said he had made a list of possible purposes for his voyage. He'd forgotten about the list until I told him about my family history research. He found that inspiring. Many people have told me they are

inspired to learn more about their families from hearing my stories.

Caught the 8:20 bus to Bohinj. Fall harvest displays appearing, with corn, pumpkins, gourds. Met a nice couple from West Seattle at the bus stop. They said Albania was cool and people spoke English. The weekend bus fare was €1.30. The driver was surly. They all have been.

Even the bus stops have flower baskets. Who waters them every day?

The driver did not announce the Bohinj stop - good thing I recognized it from the other day. I used the clean, free WC, got hike info from the TI (they had a nice selection of souvenirs).

An overcast day but 64 degrees. Great walking weather. It feels a bit like fall, and a few leaves are starting to fall. The highest peaks are hidden by clouds.

I walked to the Vogar trailhead above Stara Fužina. Google Maps tried to put me on the wrong trail, but maps.me was correct. It costs €20 a day to park at the trailhead!

The trail was steep and rocky, without switchbacks. A huge group of teens passed me, 80 or 100 kids. What is with these enormous teen groups I've seen? I made it to the paragliding viewpoint and watched half a dozen turn lazy circles in the air below. This jumpoff spot has no vehicle access, so you'd have to hike your gear up.

I think all of the hikers I saw were Slovenian. I decided to turn around here and save my legs for another hike, so I did not make it all the way to the Vogar hut. But the view from the spot I did make it to was great.

The hike down was tiring and my legs were shaking. It's just a big rock field. I was happy to be back on a road. The forecast called for afternoon rain, but instead the sun came out and there were patches of blue.

I walked to the village of Srednya Vas along country lanes, and past barns & fields. These are real working farms interspersed with summer homes & rentals. Flower baskets everywhere. On the edge of the village is the path to Ribnica Falls. Donald recommended it. It was a pretty easy walk along a pretty stream with a series of low stone dams (purpose unknown). Then I had to cross a bunch of mossy rocks and thought about turning back. But I forged on to the first falls, which was small but pretty. Too tired to keep going. On the way back saw two women & a man cutting firewood. At the falls I saw a big frog.

I found a really nice bike path back to Bohinj and the bus. It followed the river. Guys fly fishing (popular here). So nice to be off the road. The country roads are narrow, and cars fly, not much shoulder for walking. There is a big network of paved bike paths all over the area.

I got to the bus stop two minutes before the hourly bus arrived. I'd been walking for seven hours. There was a huge line, but we all fit. I am smelly,

and feel bad for my seatmate! Left Bohinj at 4, back in Bled at 4:45. The town was mobbed with weekenders.

Tom said the only place in town with good Slovenian food is Pri Planincu, on the main drag. Mushroom soup is a specialty this time of year so I ordered a bowl. The broth was thick & delicious, with a dollop of sour cream. There were several kinds of mushrooms that looked fresh & real, in pretty big chunks. But they were lightly cooked and rubbery. Chatted with two British women here on holidays. One of them guessed I was from the nw US by my accent! 6 euros for the soup. No bread.

Back to the hostel at 6. Paid up (only €153 for 5 nights) and chatted with Tom, who is so friendly. He showed us pictures of his 2.5 year old daughter, Asya. The hostel closes soon for the winter. Tonight it's just Elena and me in the dorm room. There are a few other people in private rooms (the house sleeps 14 in one 6-person dorm & some private rooms).

Sun Oct. 1

Said goodbye to Tom & Elena about 9:30. Another lovely morning. Bus left at 10:40, weekend cost only €1,60. I always get a little nervous leaving my luggage in the hold, and hope it's still there when I arrive!

Loading is slow, as it's cash only for non-locals who don't have a bus card, and the driver has to make change and print receipts.

Dance track pop music gets old, and I was glad for my own music.

By the time we got to Kranz it was standing room only. Stop & go traffic coming into Ljubljana. Arrived at noon, walked to central square. Mobbed with smiling Sunday strollers. Lovely accordion music - I gave him the last of my coins, as the music really added to the ambience. 69 degrees!

Ate my sandwich by the fountain. Walked along the river to hostel. Antiques and art flea market tables set up. Throngs of people strolling, eating, drinking at cafe tables.

Arrived at Sax Pub Hostel at 1. Sat in the quiet garden reading and doing wifi until my room was ready at 2. Bottom bunk, yay!

Nice location near the river, on a canal. €25 per night. Friendly young owners. Four-bed room with reading light & free lock for locker. Roomy kitchen. Jazz theme and jazz music playing.

Got a caramel-hazelnut ice cream, then walked along the canal to Don & Dawn's in the Rožna Dolina neighborhood. Trails took me most of the way, and it was peaceful, with few cars on the route. Had a nice one-hour visit with them. Grocery stores are closed, so I had a delicious €12 veggie burger near the hostel. So nice sitting outside by the canal, watching the vibrant street life.

Mon. Oct. 2

The GoOpti van picked me up right on time at 6:10. We picked up one other person. The airport is near Kranj, about 30 minutes from Ljubljana. 12 euros was worth it.

The friendly young driver said they had anti-maskers & anti-Vaxers too, and people nearly coming to blows over it. He said all of the good jobs in Slovenia are in Ljubljana, and he doesn't think it's a good thing. He said Slovenia escaped most of the Independence War fighting & tensions, and tensions still run high between Bosnians and Serbians; many older people who lost loved ones in the war are still very angry.

The Ljubljana airport is small & quiet. It would have cost €71 to check my bag, but luckily they let me carry it on. Limited food options, so I got a sandwich (cheese, pesto, tomato on a brown roll) for €7. They have smoking cabinets inside the airport.

(Aside: Donald says the police in Slovenia are nice and are well liked.)

At the gate at 7:45. Flight left at 10, just a few minutes late. Actually 30 minutes. They had a bird strike coming in and had to do a safety check. I got a window seat in the back row. 2.5 hours to Helsinki (which is one time zone east). Lots of islands off the coast. FinnAir flight.

Easy airport to navigate. Tons of sleeping benches. At the gate by 2 pm. 4 pm flight took off at 4:30. Seat 36G, in the middle, but seat on my left empty! Bottle of water in the seat pocket. Also a Finn Air flight. Delicious meal: meatballs in red wine sauce, mashed potatoes, carrots, quinoa salad. Then I slept for a few hours. Watched a documentary about Finland and their progressive social policies. Really good. They served us a lemon muffin and blueberry juice (yum) before we landed, at 5:40 pm, in Chicago.

It only took an hour to go through customs, take the train to terminal 2, go through security, and get to the gate. Alaska Airlines flight left on time at 7:30, and I was in Seattle at 10 pm and home at 11. About 24 hours of travel time and 17 hours of flying. Not an unpleasant journey at all. Slept great and no jetlag.