

Europe 2000

09/11/2000 – Monday (Zurich)

After a very long direct flight from Dallas we are on a train again, and it feels good!

Not having to fly through New York or some other intermediate city probably reduces the overall amount of time, but 9 ½ hours is a Long time to sit on one plane (a Boeing 767-300). Otherwise we have no complaints.

We managed to rest (I wouldn't go so far as calling it sleeping) on the flight, which is good, because we have an ambitious bit of traveling left to do before we reach out hotel.

Amazingly, we got off the plane about 7:50, cleared customs, got our bags (that was the longest part), got our rail pass validated at the airport train station office, caught the 8:33 shuttle to the central station and caught the 9:07 for Como. Kathleen alertly asked the ticket agent for an itinerary. This train stops at Como on its way to Milano, saving us 2+ hours.

This route (Zurich – Milano) is reported to be one of the 5 most scenic in the world. The train is crowded: we ended up in a car with the large, scenic windows, but had to settle for the smokers section as all of the other seats were reserved.

We got into Como (Italy), asked for some directions and were directed to a bus (#4 or #7) that would take us to the boat. We got to the dock just in time to catch the hydrofoil to Bellagio, which turned out to be a great time saver: 45 minutes vs. 2+ hours.

The Hotel Gradineli is at the top of the hill behind Bellagio – a very long walk after a very long day of travel. Naturally, we are on the top floor! The good news is that we have a balcony overlooking the town and (between the buildings) the lake. It is only a 1-star hotel – the room is a little shabby, but clean.

Napped for a while, then wandered out to see the town. Had some wine, ate dinner at the outdoor café overlooking Lake Como at the Gelateria Cafeteria, then headed back to the hotel.

09/12/2000 – Monday (Bellagio)

Overnight my cold worsened and I woke up feeling miserable. We walked down for breakfast on the lake, but I quickly decided I wasn't ready for a day of sight seeing so Kathleen headed off on her own while I went back to bed. We met for lunch and I tried to hang in there for some shopping afterwards but with no better luck, so I trundled back up the hill for another nap. We met again for dinner, walked around some and called it a day.

09/13/2000 – Wednesday (Bellagio)

I slept long and well and woke up feeling a little more human about 7:30. After breakfast we hopped on the ever-present ferry's and headed across the lake to see one of the areas beautiful villas. The house wasn't really the highlight – that honor went to the surrounding gardens which were extensive and beautiful.

Had lunch (pizza and beer) nearby, then visited several other towns serviced by the ferry (we had purchases a day pass for 10,000 L – about \$16.50) including Varenna (where we had our original booking that was cancelled). After seeing several of the towns we have concluded that Bellagio is the best, so we are glad we ended up where we did.

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While in Varenna we walked (uphill, of course!) to the train station to firm up our travel plans for the trip to France. The station is closed and refers travelers requiring assistance to a nearby travel agent. She wasn't real helpful and nearly scared us into believing that we "couldn't get there from here". We stopped by the TI and found a wonderfully helpful young woman with a decent rail guide and figured things out. Although we need to get started a little early (we will catch the hydrofoil at 8:15) the trip looks manageable.

It was a good thing we checked though... we had planned to do some more train trips and had hoped to take care of all of the arrangements while in Italy, but my "lost day" put an end to that.

Had an expensive (for Italy - \$35 each) "Chef's Surprise" for dinner at a restaurant that Kathleen's eye that was OK (best beef I've had in Europe, but Kathleen wasn't impressed).

This was where the infamous "Balsamic Vinegar" explosion occurred... Kathleen shook a bottle that, much to our combined surprise, had no lid. Fortunately for the people at the surrounding tables it all pretty well went straight up. Unfortunately for Kathleen's white shirt gravity works in Italy too, and it pretty well ruined the shirt (rinsing it that night and washing it later on in Munich did nothing to remove the stains).

Somewhere along the way during the afternoon or evening Kathleen left the paper bag containing our journals somewhere – either at the lakefront bar (where we had entirely too much wine) or at the restaurant. Miraculously it ended up back at our hotel. The manager arrived at our room after we had gone to bed. After a confused bit of conversation through the door he finally convinced us that he had something that belonged to us (we initially thought he was bringing room-service to someone else) and we got the journals back. Where we lost them and how they were returned to us at the hotel will forever be a mystery.

Speaking of our hotel manager... He has the oddest voice I have ever heard, alternating between a "normal" pitch and a high-pitched, Mr. Moose from Captain Kangaroo like squeak. Very odd.

09/14/2000 – Thursday (Bellagio)

We did our usual 2-cups of coffee (me) and Cappuccino (Kathleen) with an apricot roll breakfast at one of the many restaurants that overlook the hazy lake. We sat at a table looking out over the street, watching the town wake up and witnessing the many deliveries of food and drink required to keep all of the tourists happy. There are two boat docks – one for cars and a 2nd for passenger-only boats. Unlike Norway, the population does not depend on the boats for their goods, but the tourists used them constantly (we are no different) and watching them come and go proves to be endlessly fascinating to me.

We elected to spend the day taking a boat to the North end of the lake to Colico. It was a warm, sunny day (although the haze, which seems to be ever-present, was in evidence again) and being on the water was grand. The trip took about 2 hours and was quickly over. The town itself was closed for the lunch hour siesta, and we hopped back on the next available boat after walking around for an hour or so. We got back "home", had an ice cream, went back to the hotel to change for dinner and are now at our favorite afternoon hangout.

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We have discovered an oasis on the lake... We are shaded by short, leafy trees overlooking the lake and busy car ferry, watching the sun set behind the mist shrouded mountains on the other side of the lake. For \$5 a round the waiter brings us a ½ liter of WONDERFUL white wine served with potato chips, pastries or green olives (this is the Bar Pasticceria San Remo Bellagio). It is outdoors, across the street from the row of buildings facing the lake, and we love it! We have ended up here each of the 4 nights we have been here.

The weather has been delightful – too warm for long pants and too cool for shorts. We will miss this place! The people are friendly, the exchange rate is great: what a place to get re-acquainted with Europe!

09/15/2000 – Friday (to Colmar)

This has been a train-lazy day. Got up at 6:30, packed and were at the waterfront by 7:30, plenty of time to enjoy take-out coffee and apple pastries before catching the 8:13 hydrofoil for Como.

As we were checking out of the hotel I talked briefly to two elderly women in the lobby. Our in-keeper was trying to get them a cab to the airport and I asked them if they had enjoyed their stay in Bellagio. They said emphatically “No”. They had just arrived the night before and were leaving at 7:15 (they said they had “made other arrangements”) because they couldn’t handle the steep climb up the hill and because there was nobody to help them with their baggage. I guess it is important to know what you are getting when you book a hotel!

Lake Como was everything it was billed to me. Varenna and Bellagio are definitely the place to stay (because of the good train/boat connections). I still think I prefer Bellagio, but I’d consider Varenna. I wouldn’t mind going back some day.

Once we reached Como we realized that we had no change for a bus and no idea where the train station was. The first person we asked directed us to the wrong station (it serves the local Milan-Colmar line only). We never did get real good directions to the one we were looking for: We did manage to find it eventually, but only after walking at least twice as far as we needed to.

The train itself was nice and had a great dining car (probably the best we have ever experienced) where we enjoyed a great lunch. The scenery outside was breath taking – towering mountains, deep gorges, neat as a pin Swiss towns lined with greener than green grass. We napped, and the 4+ hours passed quickly.

Basil was a warm, unexciting, town where we had a one-hour wait for our train to France. I did meet an American man (while waiting in line trying to buy a Thomas Cook rail guide – I still have not managed to find one!) who told me about his tale of travel woe. They (he was traveling with his wife) had tickets for a sleeper car from Italy (Milano) to Germany. But when the train arrived, they could not locate their car, and were still standing on the platform when the train departed. This occurred at 10:30 pm and they had no place to stay. They eventually just got on another train and slept in their seats. Poor man – he seemed lost, but not much bothered by it.

We caught the 4:23 to Colmar (a 45 minute ride)... it’s on to France!

The weather continues to be warm (which has surprised Kathleen: She packed for much cooler weather) with no sign of rain (yet).

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We arrived in Colmar to a station full of people, mainly younger. It appears to be a popular place! Stopped off and got our information for the trip to Beaune (3 trains!) that dictates that we leave shortly after noon. We then got our bearings from a large map of the city located prominently in front of the station and bravely (after our experience in Como) walked to our hotel. It was a 15 – 20 minute hike and we vowed to take a cab back!

The Hotel (St. Martin) has a 3-star and we a vast improvement over our 1-star in Bellagio. It has a private bath, a TV, and a small room safe where I was able to store my passport and the rest of the things in my neck-pouch.

I have mixed emotions about how that is working out. For walking around town it is OK: I barely notice it (mostly), but doesn't work well in the train when I need to get at the rail pass. I end up keeping it in my pocket on trains.

Anyway, we bathed (to rinse off the walk-induced sweat) and set out to see the town. Our hotel is right in the heart of the old town, really a great location: very narrow, winding streets with old buildings lining them. There are numerous sidewalk bars and restaurants as well.

We walked around, evaluating our restaurant choices, and selected the best looking one (Maison Rouge), made a reservation for 8:00 and settled down in a sidewalk bar to try some local wine.

"Alsaice" must be French for "German" because we heard that language far more than we heard French. Even the white wines are sweet like German wines. The bar we stopped at was German and had a large group of German speaking patrons at the front table. It was also apparently closing, so we paid up and moved to the Irish pub next door for one more drink before dinner.

Dinner required some patience: Service was respectfully slow. It did not appear to be too crowded, although there were two groups of 8 or so. It wasn't until much later (after we waited 30 minutes or so for our wine, and not getting our first course until 9:00) that we watched 35+ people file out of the back room. All the customers were German, and so was the food. Guess this was a good warm-up for Munich!

We walked around after eating, had a drink at the café across from our hotel and called it a day.

Fortunately, our room had A/C and good windows. We were on the 2nd floor overlooking the noisy street, but the room has cool and quiet.

09/16/2000 – Saturday (Colmar to Beaune)

We got up before 8 (we set the alarm for 7:30 but did not want to get out of bed!), had breakfast at the hotel (bread, cereal, fruit, juice and great coffee), packed and left for a brief morning on the town. Tried to find the market (and failed). Did manage a quick run through the local museum and a Dominican church (sparsely beautiful) before grabbing a few sandwiches, checking out and catching a cab to the station for our 12:23 departure.

The weather turned cooler as the morning went on. Although mostly sunny, the wind picked up and cooled things down nicely.

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My cold has mostly diminished, although my nose is still running a bit. It will probably be gone entirely in another day or two. So far, Kathleen has avoided catching it: Lets hope that holds true for the rest of the trip!

Kathleen also spent time at the station getting info on our trip to Munich. It looks like another long day of travel for us. Although we have tried several times we have been unable to buy a Cooks Rail Guide.

As it turned out the trains were fun and easy. At each station where we had to change trains the next one was waiting across the platform when we arrived. No muss, no fuss. We had a nice conversation with a French woman (and her poodle, who rode for free because he was in a carry-on bag). She lived near Dijon and was traveling back from her summer home.

Arrived in Beaune around 4 pm. The weather was delightfully cool, so we decided to hike into town (besides, there were no cabs at the station). It was a pleasant enough hike of about 15 minutes. The Tulip Hotel is nice (another 3-star) located in the heart of the old town. The room is a bit small and (of course) is on the 2nd floor overlooking the street. The bed has built in shelves on either side with reading lights. We want to stay her forever!

We stopped by the TI and booked a wine tasting tour for 5:00 Sunday, so we have that to look forward to.

Walked around and surveyed the restaurant situation: ended up making a 7:30 reservation (just to be fashionable – we were both hungry but felt that 6:30 was too early) at another Rick Steves recommendation. We settled on a local bar to sample some of the local wine, eat munchies and watch the other tourists go by.

Dinner was great for me and OK for Kathleen. We had reserved an outside table but switched to an inside one when we arrived as it had turned cool and windy by the time we got there. It was a typical narrow but deep French restaurant, and the food was very good (Kathleen just didn't care much for what she ordered). The wine here is interesting: slightly bitter and earthy. It takes a little getting used to. The beef bourguignon was superb, and so was my salmon appetizer). We didn't do much more than walk around a bit by the time we had finished with dinner before retiring.

09/17/2000 – Sunday (Beaune)

We slept in a bit today... had breakfast at a café down the street (our hotel offered one, but we couldn't tell them what time we wanted to eat when we checked in so we decided to eat out) and watched some of the Olympic coverage on TV.

Visited the Hotel Dieu (an old hospital): that was really fascinating. However, I discovered that my camera has stopped working. Don't know what that is about...

Did an in-town wine tasting after lunch. Had a lot of different wines in a neat cellar/church setting. Too bad we can't carry much with us (or, as it turns out, ship any home. Texas law forbids it). Went through the local Catholic church, heard some fantastic organ playing while we were there. Also called Munich (the pay phones take credit cards!) to let them know we will be arriving late (11 pm!).

Met our wine tour group at the TI at 5:00 and headed off with Phillip on a mad tear through wine country (the roads are really narrow here). There were a total of 8 of us (4 Americans, 4 British) and it

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was really cool. We mainly drove past the hundreds of vineyards, but stopped at one and took pictures and talked for a while. It is harvest time, so pickers were out in force. Phillip reached over and picked a few left over bunches of what surely must be the most expensive grapes in the world for us to taste.

He then took us to a small winery run by two women. The crew was cleaning up their bins, and two men were actually in the huge vats of fermenting grapes, mixing the skins and the juice. We sampled some of their young (but good!) wines as well as some grape juice that had just been pressed earlier in the day ("bugs and all" according to one of our British friends). We did buy one bottle (72 Fr). The tour was really fun – glad we did it!

Had an OK dinner (eventually) at a restaurant near the hotel. They had some kind of a problem in the kitchen – nobody as getting their main courses. They eventually got things working, but it took us 2 ½ hours. Have to start early tomorrow (9:45 am to get to Munich by 11 pm), so hit the hotel (and bed) soon thereafter.

09/18/2000 – Monday (to Munich)

Another long travel day... got up at 7:15, packed, ate at the restaurant on the plaza (got to watch some of the Olympic coverage again), check out and walked the 15 minutes or so to the train station. The air was pleasantly cool and the sky was again clear and sunny.

I guess we should have checked things out more carefully when planning this portion of the trip, because we ended up going back through Colmar on our way to Munich (on four trains).

The only major layover we had was in Strasbourg (France). We had a little over 3 hours to kill there: just enough time to walkthrough the old town, admire the beautiful old cathedral, have a few beers in a sunny sidewalk café before re-claiming our bags at the station storage place and catching our train to Munich.

Had dinner in the dining car – it was (again) very good and not too overprices (about \$20). We arrived in Munich after 10 pm and rode the S-Bahn to Marienplatz, found our hotel with minimal wandering around, and so here we are in Munich for the Oktoberfest! Our room is nice – the largest yet, with a writing table and a couch. Of course, it is on the 2nd floor overlooking the busy street. Oh well...

09/19/2000 – Tuesday (Munich)

We slept in a bit... Breakfast at the hotel was great – meats, cheeses, bread, hard boiled eggs, cereal, fruit and all the coffee and juice you wanted! We met two young Delta pilots and lingered over coffee while talking to them. Then it was time to do chores...

We got money, went by the TI for maps and advice, then found the Hertie department store and used their Internet Café (6 Dm/Hr). I got my watch band replaced for 19.90 Dm.

We also (finally) obtained a Cooks Rail Guide at a Thomas Cook currency exchange. It may turn out to be good that we did – the Eurail Aid office had only 1 terminal and there were 3 people waiting for routing information., and the line we chose at the DB information center was not moving because of some obviously complicated plans being made by 3 travelers in front of us. As there are several trains to Hamburg we decided to trust the book.

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Has a great lunch (Bratwurst, Saur Kraut, beer) at an outdoor café near the Marienplatz. The weather is cloudy and delightfully cool! We dropped most everything off at the hotel and took the tram, U-Bahn and S-Bahn to the Oktoberfest site around 3:00.

What an event – it is HUGE! Big carnival rides, booths selling all kinds of food and souvenirs, and dozens of elaborate beer halls. I had anticipated tents, but these are like large buildings, most of which also have outdoor beer gardens outside as well. And everything was jam-packed with thousands of people.

After walking around and taking in the size of the place we settled into an outdoor beer garden (Paulaner) for our first liter of beer (12.40 Dm). It took a while, but we finally fell into a fun conversation with a group of people who work in area hotels. They were fun (and helpful in getting our ½ chicken ordered).

We wandered down to the Hoffbrau tent, and took the plunge into that singing, dancing, drinking sea of humanity. The band played an eclectic mix of traditional German and American 50's & 60's rock, with an occasional John Denver song thrown in. We danced, we sang, we had beer sprayed all over us, and we drank too much. It was great fun. Our initial impression of "Once is enough" quickly gave way to great enjoyment.

We dragged our way back to the hotel by way of McDonalds for a quick coke and fry fix.

09/20/2000 – Wednesday (Munich)

Talked over breakfast with our pilot friends again (one was a SIU graduate!). They had been to Dachau yesterday and were moved by the experience.

Today is laundry day. We had the usual "how does this thing work" experience, which was complicated by a coin shute that would not work, but we eventually got everything figured out and working.

Dropped our laundry at the hotel. Walked to the Beer Garden at the Viktualien Market. By this time the sun had broken through and it was a beautiful day to be sitting outside. Very many people obviously agreed because it was quite crowded. Had more bratwurst and beer.

Then we walked over to the Deutsches Museum, Germany's answer to the Museum of Science and Industry. What a place: Huge, and every display was more interesting than the one before. Great exhibits on ships, airplanes, trains and much more. The 5 pm closing time came much too quickly – definitely worth a trip back!

Next we walked through the Marienplatz to Augustines restaurant. It has started to rain a bit so we pulled in under an umbrella and had a beer and watched the world walk by. The rain increased to the point where the stopped serving outside, so we went in, had another beer, then decided to stay for dinner (Saur Braaten for Kathleen, delicious roast duck for me) before heading back to the hotel in the rain. Off for the North tomorrow!

By the way, the problem with my camera is fixed: it was just out of film! I had finished the roll and forgotten that the display shows nothing until the next roll of film is inserted. Luckily, I discovered this in the hotel before humiliating myself in a camera store!

09/21/2000 – Thursday (to Keil)

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This has not started out as one of our better travel days... We had retired early and decided to set the alarm and catch the 9:01 train. Things went awry from the beginning as we both fell back asleep after the alarm went off. Not for long though and we decided to press on anyway.

It was raining and cool as we walked to the underground. We somehow got onto a train going the opposite direction from the station. Maybe "headed" would be a better choice of words because it didn't "go" anywhere for 10 minutes or so. We realized that we were headed in the wrong direction and got off at the next station, where we proceeded to wait for 20 minutes for the next train going in our direction to show up.

One finally arrived (by this time it was 9:20), but we reached the main station with enough time to buy sandwiches and coffee before we got onto our 9:47 train. It was a long ICE train (actually, it was two trains coupled together). According to the train plan posted on the platform the part that went to Hamburg was at the far end of the train, so we hiked all the way to the end of the platform and got on.

We had a series of problems we reserved seat (we thought we had snagged a missed reservation, but she got onto the train at the 2nd Munich stop). We finally got settled only to realize that the train plan had been wrong, and we were on the wrong end of the train!

So, we trooped back to the middle, got off at the next stop (so we could walk around the engines in the middle of the train) and walked very slowly behind a parade of elderly women looking for their seats. Finally, by about 10:30, we are sitting comfortably in 1st class and beginning to enjoy today's lengthy journey through the grey, wet countryside.

Kiel greeted us with a neat old station that is mostly under construction. The information office is in a temporary building out on the street, but they were friendly and, as usual, a great source of information. Our trip to Aero (Ærø) will take most of the day and will involve 4 trains and a boat.

The afternoon brought an end to the rain, and it was pleasantly cool and windy. We had no idea where our hotel was located, so we sprang for a cab. 6 DM later we were standing in front of our hotel (Wiking) that has an uninspired façade and an uninspiring location on a busy street well away from the train station and tourist attractions. However, the room is large and nice.

We changed, got a map and directions from the front desk manager, and set out for a walk around town. There really isn't much to recommend about Kiel from a tourist's perspective. It has a pedestrian mall area (mostly closed at this time of day) and a busy harbor with passenger ferry connections to Gothenburg and Oslo.

The highlight of our brief stay was dinner, which we ate at a restaurant near the hotel (recommended by our friendly hotel manager). It was across the street on the other side of a wooded park in an otherwise residential area – we never would have found it on our own, and what a loss that would have been for us!

It was a German restaurant with few customers, but the food was outstanding. Kathleen had a tomato and parsley salad and roast beef. I had roast pork in a mushroom gravy sauce, both accompanied by fried potatoes served in a special cast iron dish (the house specialty), all accompanied by a marvelous house beer. Desert was some kind of berries (cloud berries?) with whipped cream. The waiter also gave us complimentary shots of cold potato schnapps. At 98 DM (~\$43) it was quite a bargain!

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The exchange rates are quite in our favor this trip, which is very nice for us. The Euro is struggling, having reached a record low of \$0.84. I am reading Stephen Ambrose's "The Supreme Commander" which highlights all of the in-fighting that occurred between the allies during WWII. I guess some things just never change.

09/22/2000 – Friday (to Ærøskøbing)

Decided to get up a bit earlier and walk to the train station instead of taking a cab. Breakfast at the hotel was the usual delicious mix of stuff, and I could have lingered over the coffee all morning.

This is the coolest weather we have yet encountered – you could actually see your breath – but the clear sky and bright sunlight helped make it feel just fine. The hike took just 10 minutes, although we got a few odd looks from passers-by. I guess we look like beasts of burden with our packs on.

The train out of Kiel left 5 minutes late, and as I write this, we are sitting at Neuwittenbek (Germany) for no apparent reason. We have a 10:30 connection at one of the stations: if we miss that one, our next opportunity doesn't come around until 2:30. I hope we get moving soon!

The lengthy train trips we have taken this time have been thoroughly enjoyable and have re-captured some of the fun of our first trip together. It has taken us both a little while to relax and enjoy the ride: I think we have it down now.

I think we have decided to scrap the Stockholm – Helsinki – Tallinn round robin in favor of an additional night (preferably in Stockholm, otherwise Copenhagen) and a 2 night out & back sailing between Stockholm and Helsinki. That sounds like the best ship experience and matches our desire for a more relaxed pace for this trip.

We have talked a lot about how we pack (is it time to convert to roll-around suitcases?), what we pack (Kathleen convinced me we can get by on fewer shirts) and the length of the trip (3 weeks may be too much – 2 weeks might be better). I dunno about the length – I'm not sure I am ready to go home this weekend!

The wait at Neuwittenbek continues...

Well, we reached the station in Flensburg (Germany) just in time to see our train to Fredericia (Denmark) leaving. In spite of the fact that there was obviously no train there we went to platform 1 anyway... and found a small DB office full of helpful people. They gave us (and another lost soul) a cab voucher and told us to take a cab to Padborg, Denmark, where the train would be held for us. We did, it was, and we are on our way to Aero (Ærø), Denmark!

As we got off the train in Fredericia we saw a local train for Odense on the next track (it was across the platform). Seeing that the IC took only 36 minutes, and that this train was leaving 27 minutes earlier we decided to take a chance that it would arrive earlier: Wrong! It stopped at every station and took 1 hour. Since the train for Svendborg was across the platform when we arrived in Odense we hopped on that immediately as well.

Svendborg is a pretty little town, but it was hard to figure things out. The ferry dock wasn't marked real well. The TI was hard to find (and closed), and even Rick Steves directions from the train station were

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confusing because we didn't start from there (from where the train let us off, we never even saw the station!).

We wandered towards the water, where Kathleen parked herself with the packs while I foraged around the town for cash and food. There was a bank nearby, so that was easy, but these people appear to have never heard of sandwiches. I wandered nearly the entire shopping area and finally settled for hot dogs and cokes.

Otherwise there wasn't much to do except wait for 2 hours for the boat. As its time approached cars and people materialized seemingly out of nowhere, so the boat was full when it finally departed.

Our pension on Ærøskøbing is a short walk uphill from the boat dock and is an absolute delight. Although we are again on the 2nd floor overlooking the street, there is no street noise to worry about, and we can sit and look at passers by from our windows (which over-hang the street a bit) just like the locals.

Took a bit of an orientation walk before dinner, which was again delicious and relatively cheap at the Dat Lille Hotel for about 600 DKr (~\$60). Took a few night pictures of the town before retiring to the serenely quiet room for a well-deserved rest after another long day of travel (we started at 8:45 and arrived in Ærø at 17:45!).

09/23/2000 – Saturday (on Ærøskøbing)

Slept in a bit – it was a quiet and cool night and we both woke up well rested. Our pension is equipped with the first showers we have encountered on this trip (everywhere else it was been a tub equipped with a hand-held nozzle on a hose. In fact, the bathroom across from our room (this place has several bathrooms. Since there are only 3 rooms rented, this one is “ours”) has 2 showers and 2 sinks. The whole place is well kept and very nice.

Breakfast was served in a room off of the kitchen and overlooking the back yard. They had a fire going in the neat, tall old-looking stove. It definitely took the chill out of the air. Breakfast itself was the usual mix of eggs, breads, cheeses and meats, with the added touch of local apples and pears. They were small and bitter-sweet and reminded us both of distant memories.

Kathleen called and booked the extra night in Stockholm, we hope. The English of the person she talked to wasn't the greatest, and my side of the conversation sounded a lot like a Monty Python skit (Kathleen was not laughing though).

Today's entertainment was an 18 mile bike tour of the central part of the island. It is interesting: we now find ourselves going places (like Ærø) and doing things (like this ride) that would have seemed impossible just a few years ago.

Anyway, the ride was just great. We had little difficulty with the route (only got lost once or twice) or the terrain (which is mainly flat, with 2 – 3 hills that we walked up). The island consists mainly of farms, all of which are busily getting their fields ready for the approaching winter. The towns are, for the most part, small: really nothing more than a collection of houses.

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We had lunch at a tavern. I ordered an omelet – it was as delicious as it was huge. Kathleen got a very large tomato mozzarella sale and fried fish that looked really good too. A couple of bottles of Carlsberg beer helped raise the apparent height of the hills later in the afternoon.

We rode out to a park of sorts – hills overlooking the ocean, with steps leading down to the water. It was a popular picnic spot, and there were several groups of bikers and car-bourn picnickers there. As we were leaving a tour bus pulled in, which is kind of amazing considering that the road is only a narrow gravel-covered lane.

We also found the 5000-year-old monolithic mound (it looked like a few large rocks in the middle of a field) being a church. We were two tired and butt-sore people by the time we returned the bikes at 4 pm. Fun note: the rental place closed at noon. He told us to just leave the bikes behind the building.

The weather today was been marvelous – sunny without a hint of a cloud in the deep blue sky. We changed for dinner and sat in the bar by the boat dock watching the Ærøskøbing population buy their evening meal fixings at the grocery store next door.

After a few beers we walked down to watch the arrival of the ferry, then walked past the harbor to the beach where the locals maintain tiny little beach houses. They are small (6' x 6', 8' x 8'), usually with no water, but they provide some shelter from the elements along with tables and chairs.

Eventually ended up at the “Something Mumms” restaurant for dinner around 7:30, but they said they were completely booked. We decided that we really weren't hungry enough for a big meal anyway and went back to the pub and had fish & chips.

We also decided that there was no real rush to get to Copenhagen Sunday and thus no need to catch the 8:45 ferry: the next one would still allow us to reach Copenhagen by mid-afternoon, which is just fine.

The evening turned cooler and the wind picked up considerably. The walk back to hotel was brisk! We retired early with a window open so we could snuggle, warm and secure under our blankets. The bike ride really wore us out!

09/24/2000 – Sunday (to Copenhagen)

On the ferry waiting for departure... Our decision to take the later boat was brilliant – it allowed us the pleasure of a relaxed and leisurely morning before catching the 11:45 ride back to the mainland.

Talked to Suzanne (our host) over coffee. She is very friendly and chatted happily with her three groups of guests in English, German and Danish. She and her husband have owned the Inn for 3 ½ years. She estimates that 60% of her business comes to her from Rick Steves books (He has stayed twice – she said he is very nice and always insists on paying).

We had a similar conversation at our hotel in Munich. He estimated his Rick Steves bookings at 40%.

It is another beautiful day – clear and warm, except for a steady cool breeze – a great day for sailing! We took one last walk around town after breakfast while waiting for the boat. Our hosts watched our bags for us. They seemed ready to leave for the ferry when we returned (they are sailing as well) when we arrived at 11:15 to get our stuff. There were a lot of cars lines up, but they made it on the boat!

Europe 2000

The train was waiting in Svendborg, as expected. We decided to skip the first train out of Odense we would have time to buy a sandwich, but we did that so quickly we decided to grab it anyway. We somehow got confused and (we think) got on the wrong train (maybe it wasn't going all the way to the main station in downtown Copenhagen...). Anyway, we were sitting on it, happily munching our sandwiches when I looked out the window and saw the 2:15 train for Copenhagen that we thought we were on depart.

We got off before that train left and regrouped a bit and settled in to wait for the 2:47. Kathleen wanted to get reservations but I talked her into doing it on the train if necessary. This time she was right: reservations were not required, just recommended because the train is crowded. We couldn't find seats, so hung out in the entry way until the conductor came along and found us seats in the business class (not together). Discovered near the end of the trip that they had pitchers of free coffee.

Hit downtown Copenhagen around 4:30 or so. The bad news was that the TI wasn't open on Sunday. The good news is that the Tivoli was still open (tonight was its last night of the season), had discounted tickets for admission and unlimited rides. Admission was 48K, admission & Rides was normally 178 Kr but tonight was only 100 Kr. We found the hotel from a map posted outside the TI (a easy 2-block walk from the train station, through what Rick Steves calls a "Seedy neighborhood", dumped our stuff and headed out to enjoy our unexpected Copenhagen bonus (the Tivoli had just closed before we arrived on our last visit in 1992).

What fun! It is an old park, small by American Six Flags standards, but full of neat things: rides, restaurants and amusements. We both rode the roller coaster. Kathleen insisted that I stand in line for ~30 minutes to ride the free-fall tower (it was way cool!). We had Fish & Chips, saw the marching band twice, heard a 20's seeing band concert, and capped off the increasingly cool evening in a bar listening to good rock music and alternating our attention between the Olympic coverage on TV and the Danish panorama that was walking by outside. Danes of every age turned out for the season finale for the grand old park.

Cut through the train station (I can't believe that I was so impressed by its grandness last time that I actually walked back there just to take a few pictures – it looks a bit rundown now!) on our way back to the hotel. "Seedy" or not, it is still well run. They even have a free internet café for guests! The neighborhood has sex shops, but it is relatively quiet and seemed safe enough on our walk back tonight.

09/25/2000 – Monday (in Copenhagen)

Slept well and woke up at 8:00. At breakfast (no eggs!) we ran into a couple we "met" on the train from Padborg, Denmark a few days ago. They have been staying in Denmark and are working their way towards Norway. They are an older couple from New Zealand. He said he had done the Flam detour 30 years ago and were headed there to do it again.

We went to the travel agent in the train station to book the cruise to Finland. The agent we got was great – helpful and knowledgeable. The whole trip (including seat reservations on the train to Stockholm) came to 1700 DKr (about \$170). Considering that that is logging for 2 nights, plus transportation, we are pleased.

The train to Stockholm is a little weird - it doesn't originate in Copenhagen. We need to take a local train to Malmo first.

Europe 2000

Walked down the pedestrian mall and stopped into several stores but bought very little. Got a birthday present for Jane Abling (well, Kathleen did) and bought a platter to match our turkey platter. They charged 200 Kr to ship it, but took off 120 Kr VAT, so came out almost even.

Had a real Copenhagen hot dog for lunch (still good), took the boat tour, took a million Nyhaven pictures, sat in the sun and had a beer in a bar overlooking said body of water, then walked back to the hotel.

One of the nice features about this place is that they have free internet access from a computer in a small room off of the lobby, so we sent our second set of commentary to the world before setting out for dinner.

Decided to walk all the way over to Christianshavn and try one of Rick Steves recommendations. The directions were unclear, the 1st place was closed, and the other was really hard to find, but turned out to be well worth the effort. Started with artichoke soup with bacon: Kathleen had Haddock ("A typical Danish meal" according to our waiter), and I had duck, all washed down with a bottle of Muscadet – all for 669 Kr. It was an obviously local restaurant (who the hell else could even find it?) with few diners (we made the third table) but it had a neat atmosphere (Bastionen + Løven Café/Bar/Restaurant).

Walked all the way back to the hotel – it seemed to have warmed up a bit and was not as cold as last night. Today was hot in the sun and cool in the shade.

Have an early start tomorrow – we are both looking forward to being on a boat!

09/26/2000 – Tuesday (To Stockholm & Beyond)

Woke to a cool, overcast day – good travel weather! We were in the train station by 7:45 for our alleged 8:16 departure for Malmo.

The train showed up, everybody got on, and we just sat there through our scheduled departure time. We thought (hoped) that they had just decided to wait for 8:32 ads published in the schedules we had, but that time came and went as well. Our 23 minute window in Malmo was rapidly evaporating

W conductor came through asking if any passengers were headed for the airport, so we knew something was not good, but it took the help of some of our fellow travelers to figure out that the train was broke and wasn't going anywhere soon, and we were to take the 8:36 on track 4 instead.

We all headed over there and made that train. Figuring that we wouldn't have much time in Malmo we were ready to jump off the train as soon as it stopped. Good thing, because what we hoped was our train (from a frantic look at the monitor listing departures) was on the next platform and pulled out shortly after we got on. Surprisingly, there appeared to be only a handful of us making that connection (or else the rest of them are still milling about the platform in Malmo looking for their train!).

We were required to have reservations on this train, although why this is a requirement is not obvious to us – there are only a handful of people in our car, which is one of the business class types of arrangements that we have seen in Scandinavia for the first time. It is very comfortable – 2/4 seating, and all seats have a table. There is also a self-serve coffee area.

The sky is clearing, and we are enjoying the flat but scenic view outside the window. Sweden is starting to display her fall colors in the many trees that line our route north.

Europe 2000

Our arrival in Stockholm, and transfer to the boat, was fairly simple. We changed some money, got info, and took the bus from Gate #28 right to the Silja Line terminal (20 Kr each). We checked in and had a 45-minute wait before we were able to board the ship (the Serenade).

The room is nice – bed already made up and a 2nd fold down next to it, with a desk, closet and bathroom. Everything is a bit tight, space-wise, but comfortable. The rest of the boat, however, is huge: 12 decks with four (or more) restaurants, bars and a shopping mall.

We booked the first seating at the smorgasbord, then went up on deck to watch the departure. The weather was cool, and there were a few clouds, but it still was quite lovely as we watched the sun sink in the western sky behind Stockholm as we left.

Dinner was very good (but not great) – all the variety you would expect, and most of it good. We sat at a table with a couple sailing on tickets given to them by a friend. They were Swedish and run a marina what sounds like a really remote part of the country. She said that the loudest thing they could hear was silence. He understood most English OK but didn't speak much. She spoke English and Spanish (she had lived in Mexico City for 5 years) and we got along just fine.

Didn't do much more... went up on deck for a while, had a few drinks, then crashed for the night.

09/27/2000 – Wednesday (Helsinki)

Slept very well and woke up at 7:30. The room was very comfortable and surprisingly quiet. We didn't arrive in Helsinki until 9:30.

We booked a 10:00 bus tour. It was fun (for a bus tour): informative and gave us a good overview of the city. When it finished, we walked through the market (bought a carved bear, covered in tar, and that may prove to have been a mistake: it smells!). Took pictures in the town square, then had lunch. That was fun – ate in a large tent set up by Fosters Beer with a large screen TV providing Olympic coverage. They sold beer, sandwiches and hot meals (we had lasagna).

Then we moved on to the nearby train station (designed by the man – or his son – who designed the St. Louis arch. It was impressive: it has a Pullman bar! The bulk of the day was spent in the National Museum – full of lots of interesting tidbits about the history of the Fins.

Finished off with coffee at a beautiful Iron/wood/glass café near the waterfront (Café Kappeli) before heading back onto our ship around 4:00. Took some pictures of the city from the observation deck. Saw more hot air balloons being launched (just like in Stockholm) and naturally took a million pictures. I hope at least one turns out OK.

I took the plunge and visited the sauna: what a way to relax! Had a few drinks, then dinner in the seafood restaurant. It cost more (and additional 200 Kr – about \$28) but it was worth it. Lobster for an appetizer, boiled haddock in a red wine sauce and a bottle of Australian Chardonnay.

Still had some life in me (must have been the sauna) so went through Duty Free and bought some wine and chocolate and sat in a quiet corner and watched the water roll by. Finished up on the observation deck for one last breath of fresh air before calling it a night.

09/28/2000 – Thursday (Stockholm)

Europe 2000

Up at 7:00 to get ready for our 9:00 arrival. Had breakfast, which was served in the same room as the smorgasbord, with a large variety of meats, cheeses, breads, cereals, juices, etc.

Once we docked, we took a cab directly to our hotel (the Lady Hamilton). Our room wasn't ready, but they offered to get it ready in 30 minutes (at least they were expecting us!) and offered us some coffee in the breakfast room while we waited. The woman at the next table noticed our Rick Steves book and started talking to us. She is from Seattle, over on a mixed working/pleasure trip with her husband. They were in Turkey first ("hot, dusty"). She clued us into the fact that many museums are now on shortened hours (~10 – 3).

Decided to keep today loose. Did Rick's walking tour of the neighborhood (hard to follow in places!), then took a short (45 minute) boat tour. Had coffee near the Opera (after discovering that there was only 1 ticket left for a concert in the Opera Hall tomorrow). Made a list of things to do and decided we really ought to take advantage the Armory being open late on Thursday's so we could see all of the other museums on Friday and Saturday.

Had lunch in a Greek restaurant and watched the Olympics on their big TV.

The Armory was really fascinating – had some obscure items from 400 – 500 years ago (clothes kings were killed in, christening gowns, lots of armor, etc.). Also had a neat exhibit on Royal Coaches as well as one on the role of Queens through the ages.

We had pie with coffee and were a little ambivalent about dinner, but I decided to go ahead, and I was glad we did. Ant at Pagannini's on Vasterlanggaten, and it was good. Had to wait 45 minutes to get seated, but the waiting area overlooked the narrow street and had glass (it is closed off with a metal roll-up wall that was up) so could drink beer and watch the world go by.

We both had salads, pasta, and an excellent Spanish red wine (775 Kr). Walked back to the hotel and crashed.

A word about the hotel: It is nice, with neat decorations everywhere – almost like a museum. We are on the top floor in a large room with a sloped roof on one side creating a cushioned bench under two skylights. By far the nicest place we have been in on this trip – a great way to end our vacation.

09/29/2000 – Friday (Stockholm)

After breakfast we wandered around a bit trying to find a place that sold the Tourist (transit) card. Most stores don't open until 10, and we ended up going to the TI by the Opera to get them. While we were there, Kathleen decided to ask if they had tickets to the lunch-hour concert, and they did (120 Kr each).

So we skipped over to the Vasa on the #47 bus. The boat was fascinating and well preserved: 98% of the original boat was recovered, along with many artifacts. Looking at how high and narrow it was, I am not surprised that it tipped over!

We then hurried back to the Opera for our 12:30 concert. Stopped off for our 1st McDonalds fix on the trip (and briefly watched some of the Olympics there). Walked into the Opera Hall, down into the basement (not into the main Opera hall like we had hoped) and found, much to our surprise, that this was actually an opera LUNCH concert. They were serving a chef's salad with a roll and our choice of light beer or juice.

Europe 2000

Naturally, since we arrived 5 minutes before 12:30, seating was an issue. We ended up wedged into a table right in front of the piano. Turns out we were there to hear selections from several (~7) operas, each introduced with a lengthy (and incomprehensible, since it was in Swedish) introduction.

It was well done (baritone sang well, and the piano player was great) and lasted 45 minutes. We did get to go up and see the magnificent opera afterwards, so it wasn't a complete loss in that regard.

We next headed to the underground to go to the Jewish museum. After walking to the address given in the museum guide we discovered – no museum. We wandered around a bit and found a couple of signs at the corner, so we knew we weren't crazy. Went back to the address and looked more closely at the dozen or so buttons on the door and found our museum listed. It turned out to be a small 4 room setting with 2 displays.

The first dealt with how Jews were treated in neutral Sweden. They had a movie of interviews of survivors, but (unfortunately) it was only in Swedish. The rest of the exhibit consisted of pictures and other items of the day, all well documented in the English handout they loaned us.

The other room contained an exhibit explaining Jewish customs, traditions and the things used to celebrate them. The main room also had a lot of literature and books for sale. They also gave us copies of a book documenting the holocaust that is used in the public schools in this country.

We did a bit of shopping. Kathleen bought the soap she likes ad NK for 18Kr for 6 bottles. She also bought some Swedish candle holders near the hotel for 180 Kr each. We then crashed at our hotel for a while (reading) to recharge our legs a bit before heading out to dinner.

We tried Kristina's this time. We both had tomato & mozzarella salads: I had perch and Kathleen had spaghetti. The food was great, and they had a jazzy band in the main dining room, which was where we were seated.

We were tired, so just came back to the hotel, read and slept. It is nice to have a large, comfortable room that we can relax in. We are both very happy to be staying in this part of town because everything is so close and convenient.

09/30/2000 – Saturday (Stockholm)

We had planned to hit the Royal Apartments and the Treasury, but it was such a beautiful, sunny day that we decided to throw that agenda out the window and spend more time outside. Unfortunately, the boat tour to the islands was not running, or we would have taken that!

We spent the morning walking around and taking all of the pictures we hadn't taken in the past two days (the cloudy weather just didn't inspire us). I went through two+ rolls of film. Happened to be right across from the beautiful National Theatre when the Royal Band marched by on their way to the castle – home some of the pictures turn out!

Had coffee (me) and wine (Kathleen) in a bar/restaurant and watched some more of the Olympics. We've probably seen more coverage here on vacation than we would have if we were working back home! There seems to be a lot of interest in the event here: I wish I had taken a picture in the restaurant mirror – we could see everybody in the bar (even the bar tenders and two women standing in the doorway) all staring intently at the TV screen.

Europe 2000

Had hot dogs on the way over to the Cathedral for a concert. Our inability to comprehend the ads continued: what we thought was going to be an organ recital was instead a choir (2 of them, actually). They were quite good, and the setting was beautiful.

After the concert I scooted back up to the German Church to photograph their stained-glass windows. The person working at the information desk was very friendly, interested in my equipment, and quite helpful. I took a lot of close-ups of the windows. I couldn't get full frame shots (there were lots of lights and balconies in the way). I hope a few of them turn out.

We had reserved the Sauna at the hotel for 2:30 (100 Kr for the two of us). It was really neat! It consists of several rooms in the basement: a dressing area, a sitting area (with a fireplace) that must be very cozy in the winter, a shower room, the sauna itself, and a well from the 1300's that was discovered when the hotel was renovated in 1978. The well was full of cold water, but it sure felt good after sitting in the sauna for a while.

After that refreshing experience we found a bar with outdoor seating (the same Greek restaurant where we had lunch on our first day in the city) and enjoyed the weather, scenery, passers-by and, of course, the fine beer.

Decided to try a restaurant of our own choosing and picked an Italian restaurant that had caught our eye. Had stopped by and made a reservation on our way by earlier in the afternoon, which turned out to be a good thing: They reserved a nice table by the window for us, and were turning away people the whole time we were there. The food was good: the lobster bisque was to die for! We both had pasta's that were good as well.

Walked around for a while after dinner. Kathleen had intended to stop by an ice cream shop for dessert, but they had just closed by the time we got there (rats!) and we never could find one that was open. So we bid a sad farewell to this beautiful city and returned to our hotel.

10/01/2000 – Sunday (On our way home)

Got up at 6:15 and began the arduous task of packing and hauling ourselves to the airport. The hotel arranged for an early breakfast and a 7:45 cab. We got downstairs a bit late and barely had time for a few sips of coffee. We did make a "breakfast sandwich" out of a roll with ham and cheese.

The cab soon had us at the bus terminal (90 Kr). We walked onto the 7:50 bus to the airport (60 Kr each) and were on our way. "Next time" we need to look into the train option. – I saw it go by while we were riding on the bus.

The airport was totally un-crowded, and we were soon through into the secure zone, anticipating our grand duty-free shopping extravaganza. There must have been a concert involved somehow because this didn't exactly turnout as planned either. There were only four stores, with little of interest to us, except for a crystal carving of an Eskimo that that we had seen (but not purchases) in Copenhagen (780 Kr). We didn't buy anything else except coffee and muffins.

American Airlines also screwed up mu ORD – DFW seat assignment, so we were not assigned seats together. We changed to the bulkhead row (the only two seats together available) but I am not pleased about that. Maybe we can improve things in Chicago.

Europe 2000

Otherwise, the airport experience was a yawner and took next to no time. We were through with check in and security by 9:00. Kathleen did have to get some of our VAT money back. Luckily, we had packed most of the gifts in our carry-on luggage, because you must have them with you to get the refund (which amounted to \$13, hardly worth the effort).

After buying the last item we ended unpacking our collapsible suitcase and putting all that stuff in there, which made the packs a lot more manageable, so it was a good thing that we had that along after all.

Overall, we think that this has been a great trip. Having the itinerary (and the hotels) arranged in advance helped a lot, as did our tendency to stay in one city for multiple nights. These last few days in Stockholm have been especially restful and relaxed – the perfect end to a vacation!

Lessons Learned/things to do differently

- The fuzzy coat/jacket shell is unbeatable! I only wore my sweater once, just to dress up a bit.
- The shoe-like hiking shoes are a great improvement over the boots: more comfortable and better looking. I barely used my sandals or my running shoes – they were a waste of space.
- It would have been nice to reduce the number of shirts in order to reduce space taken up in the pack and eliminate the need to stuff the day pack.
- It may be better to photocopy the relevant pages out of the travel books rather than carry all of the books themselves.
- White socks get too dirty to wear a 2nd day. Bring as many black socks as possible.
- Have the camera & lenses cleaned and checked before the trip.
- It's better to stay in the center of town to be closer to the action than to be near the train station.
- When booking rooms, ask for a quiet room off the street.
- The bike ride on Aero was great fun!

Check-List for the next trip

- City maps!
- Photocopies of relevant pages from travel books incorporated into our itinerary (leave the books back home!)
- Small notebook to write notes when booking trains, boats, etc.
- Shirts with collars (short sleeves)
- Shirts with collars (long sleeves)
- Pick shirts with colors that work with black or blue pants
- Black/dark dress slacks – 2 pair
- Dressier 2nd pair of shoes
- Dark socks – 3 pr
- White socks (for wear with shorts only) – 7 pr
- Shorts – 1 pr
- Running shorts/swimming trunks
- T-shirts (10)

Europe 2000

- Underwear (10 pr)
- Jacket & Fuzzy
- Hat & Gloves
- Baseball hat
- Bluejeans
- Hiking shoes (not boots!)
- Alarm clock
- Binoculars
- Small camera
- Camera, lenses, extra batteries, film, film bag
- Day pack
- Reversible belt
- Neck-pouch for passport
- Journal, pen, pencil, highlighters
- Cold medicine, aspirin
- Vitamins
- Sun screen, aloe
- Some travelers checks (\$300)
- Cash (\$200)
- Expandable suit case (for purchases on the way home)
- Handkerchiefs (4)