

**Germany and Belgium  
May/June 2026**

## 26 May 2026 – Tuesday

### Dallas → Frankfurt

The day of departure for this trip that has been in the planning stage for so long finally arrived! Katheen has planned every step of the trip out in magnificent detail, and we both have been doing deep research into our family histories so we can take maximum advantage of our visit.

We have a 4:00 flight to Frankfurt. We elected to take the light rail to the airport, and Cliff has kindly offered to drive us to White Rock station where we will begin our journey.

We had received several text messages from American Airlines notifying us that our flight had been delayed due to mechanical problems but elected to keep to our original schedule and spend more time at the airport.

I had bragged about how much nicer the Silver Line train (and route) was compared to the Orange line, so even though we had to leave an hour earlier that was the route we planned: Blue Line to Mockingbird Station, Red Line to 12<sup>th</sup> Street, then Silver Line to DFW terminal B.

The Red Line and the Silver Line appeared to run on the same track for two stations (CityLine/Bush and 12<sup>th</sup> street). When I looked at the schedule, I decided that we would have a shorter wait between trains if we went to the 12<sup>th</sup> Street station. Bad idea!

First of all, I almost missed getting off the train when it reached the elevated station. When we did, there was no signage about the Silver Line. I finally found one sign at the end of the platform and saw that the Silver Line was at ground level, and the platform was some distance away. So we took the elevator down and hurriedly walked ~2 blocks to the platform, where we joined a DART security officer and a few others on their way to the airport.

We were on the correct platform (2) but the announcements (there were several) kept saying that the train would be arriving on Platform 1. None of us paid the slightest bit of attention until the train arrived on Platform 1. Luckily, we were able to cross over and were (finally!) on the Silver Line train and headed to the airport.

Note to self: Next time we take this route change trains at CityLine/Bush!

We arrived, checked our bags, got through security and split a Salmon Alexander at Pappa Deux's, then had drinks at a nearby bar while we kept up with the ever-changing departure time for our flight. They finally changed planes and announced that they had auto-updated seat assignments: Fortunately for us we stayed in the same exit row seats we had booked.

Joined the masses at the gate and finally left the gate at 6:45 and departed at 7:30. We got lucky – nobody was sitting in the 3<sup>rd</sup> seat, so we had plenty of room to stretch out.

The dinner (noodles with tomato sauce) was an improvement over the meals we had on our March flight to Hawaii, and we both really liked the red wine, but the breakfast was just as disappointing.

*8,402 steps*

## 27 May 2026 – Wednesday

### Frankfurt -> Schweinfurt

We both managed to sleep a lot and arrived at Frankfurt Terminal 3 at 11:30 am (local time: 4:30 am Dallas Time) better rested than any other trip we could remember. We went through an automated customs area where they scanned our passports, took our picture and scanned our fingerprints (although Kathleen could not make the fingerprint scanning part work). She got that straightened out when we reached the agent. We answered the usual questions about our visit and had to show him our booking information proving that we had a return flight booked before he would allow us to proceed.

Information about accessing the train at the airport is apparently some kind of national secret. We started to follow the instructions Kathleen had researched and followed the signs in the airport but were intercepted by an official-looking person who told us that things had changed and we needed to go outside and take a bus to Terminal 1.

We managed to do that, but when we arrived had no clue what to do next. We talked to some official-looking person who told us (in broken English) that we needed to go past several escalators that were out of service, go up one level, cross over the road to the building across the street, back-track to reach the station.

We did, but when we reached the entry to the building across the street it was closed off. When we asked the person standing there how to reach the train station, she allowed us to pass and we continued our pilgrimage to the elusive train station.

We finally arrived and found the ticket office (Kathleen had pre-purchased tickets but had missed the train due to our late arrival). Some of the original tickets were non-refundable, but we were able to apply some of what we had paid to purchase the new tickets.

Getting down to the train platform was a bit of work as both the escalator and the elevator were out of order (much of the airport was under construction).

There was a train at the platform but the sign on the platform indicated that it was only going to Frankfurt, and we were expecting a train to Hanau (where we will catch the next train to Schweinfurt). I asked the conductor who was standing on the platform if this was the correct train. He examined our tickets, said "yes", but then continued (in very broken English) by trying to explain how we could take a "better" route by getting off the train in one of the Frankfurt stations (there are two) and catching some other train. We thanked him, got on the train and decided to stay with the route we had ticketed as neither of us understood what he tried to tell us to do.

Reached Hanau and boarded the next train. It was very crowded, and there was no place to put our luggage, so I left Kathleen (and her suitcase) at a seat at the front of the car and went back to care for bicycles and elderly travelers. I only had to stand for one stop before a seat became available.

It was a 2-hour ride to Schweinfurt, but we both enjoyed watching the passing scenery until we arrived at Schweinfurt.

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026

Grabbed a cab at the station to take us to the Mercure Hotel. That was a good decision as it would have been a long and difficult walk. Our cab driver was from the Czech Republic and pointed out several things (such as the location of the TI) in broken English and German as he drove. However, when we arrived, we discovered that he had no way of accepting a credit card. He finally (reluctantly) accepted \$40 in American currency. He even started to give us the difference in Euro's (the charge was 13 Euro's), but we told him to keep it.

Noticed a Viking boat tied up on the canal as we arrived.



The hotel is much as we remember from our previous visit, except for an addition of a large conference facility off the lobby. The room (on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor overlooking the canal) is nice. We sat outside and enjoyed the warm, sunny weather and had several drinks before walking down to the nearby Italian restaurant only to discover that it was closed (the Viking boat had departed by this time). So, we returned to the hotel and had a wonderful meal: wiener schnitzel with fried potatoes and a bottle of local wine.

*4,267 steps*

## 28 May 2026 – Thursday

### Schweinfurt, Niederschmalkalden, Wernshausen & Rossdorf

We both slept well and did not get up until 6:30. Sleeping on the plane as much as we did really seems to have helped us make a quick time-zone adjustment.

Breakfast was great, but my attempt to order a macchiato for Kathleen failed – what she appears to have gotten instead was a double cappuccino.

There were many boats traveling on the canal this morning.



Kathleen checked out when the archive in Duisburg was going to be open and discovered that the only time we would be able visit it was Friday morning (closed Thursday due to the celebration of Corpus Christi - a Catholic holiday). So, she decided to skip Heidelberg so we could arrive in Cologne two days early so we could have two full days in the archive.

We walked to the train station (took us about 20 minutes) and made the necessary changes to our train tickets (the woman at the ticket office was great!). The station was very convenient: It had an ATM machine, so we got some cash, and the Sixt car-rental office was right across from the ticket office.

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026

By this time, it was about 11:00, and our scheduled pickup time was not until 12:00. The agent advised us to wait until 12:00 to avoid a substantial (100 Euro) increase in the rental cost. So we went to the restaurant next door and had a cup of coffee and returned just after noon.

The agent talked me into an upgrade so we could get a VW T-ROC, which turned out to be a really nice vehicle. They helped us get my iPhone Bluetooth connection working so we could use CarPlay, and we were soon on our way to Niederschmalkalden... or so we thought. I somehow managed to enter the wrong town as our destination. Kathleen quickly noticed we were heading the wrong way before we had gone very far. We pulled over, got the correct destination and were soon headed in the right direction.

Arrived about 2:00 and found the church and nearby cemetery without much trouble. The cemetery is small and immaculately maintained. A man arrived to maintain some graves, and I noticed that they were Amborns. He did not speak much English, but we did determine that he was also an Amborn and thus was probably a distant relative (probably 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> cousin)... Small world!



Drove over to Wernshausen and quickly found our way to the church and cemetery (it was easy – it is located on the tallest hill in town!). It too was immaculately maintained.



After walking around taking some pictures of graves there we drove on to Rossdorf, where my great grandfather Heinrich Anton Amborn was born in 1839. We walked around the church where he was baptized: It was a special feeling knowing I was walking on the ground where my ancestors had gone about their lives so long ago.

Got back to our hotel about 7:00. Kathleen applied for permission to view documents at the archive in Duisburg when we arrive there. Then we walked down to try our luck at the Italian restaurant again. They were busy but an outdoor table opened just as we arrived. Service was slow – the staff seemed to be busy chatting with other customers. I was bothered by being downwind from a chain smoker at the table next to us.

We finally got our drinks, but the food was delayed so long that the waitress got embarrassed and brought us each a complimentary glass of Prosecco. When it arrived the food (Pasta Carbonari for me, Lasagna for Kathlee) was OK.

I exchanged text messages with Thomas Hartmann while we were waiting for our food to appear. We planned to meet him and his wife (Annette) in Arnstein at 1:00 on Saturday.

Walked the short distance back to the hotel, got a glass of wine at the bar and took it up to our room.

*8,749 steps, 3 floors of stairs*

## 29 May 2026 – Friday

### Schweinfurt & Arnstein

Had a leisurely morning... slept well, ate late (~8:30) and retired to the room so Kathlen could try to organize her visit to the archive in Duisburg. She is very frustrated by the interface and is struggling to make any progress.

We planned our drive to Arnstein to visit the cemeteries... will tour the houses with Thomas tomorrow.

### Catholic Churches

- Maria Sondheim
- Spitalkirche St. Elizabeth (a hospital/charitable church)
- Stadtkirche St. Nicholas (Main town parish/church)
- St. Margaretha (built in 1605)

### Other Churches

- Kreuzbruderschaft
- Evangelische Christuskirche

### Cemeteries (Friedhuff)

- Heugrumbach (St. Margarethe)
- Marie Sondheim

[According to Thomas Hartmann, there are only two churches in Arnstein: Maria Sondheim and a small chapel in the Retirement home.]



Drove first to St. Margarethe, which is located prominently on a hill. It was the original town church (built in 1605) and is surrounded by houses and, further away, wooded hills: quite a beautiful location!

Found and photographed markers from some burials with familiar family names: A Kuempel married into the Fischer: Judging by the size of their family plot and grave markers they must have been a very wealthy family. I need to do some research to see if I can figure out how she was related to me.

We then drove to the much larger Marie Sondheim where I again photographed markers with family names (almost all of them from the past 100 years or so). Found the grave for Thomas Haremann's father.

We once again were struck by the care that these cemeteries receive while there is still family in the area, and by how older graves are (eventually) reused.

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026



We drove back into town and figured out where to park when we meet Thomas on Saturday. We are taking advantage of having tools like ChatGPT available to transcribe and translate things like parking signs and menus for us. We then returned to the hotel and walked to an outdoor bar (Mole 9) directly across the canal/river from our hotel and enjoyed the beautiful weather, several glasses of wine and a pretzel.



Later, we walked further into town and rediscovered the Bauhaus am Markt restaurant we had enjoyed so much on last visit. We sat outside for another really good meal (Chicken Cordon Bleu for me, Sauerbraten for Kathleen).

*6,836 steps, 3 floors of stairs.*

## 30 May 2026 – Saturday

### Schweinfurt & Arnstein

I woke up feeling not so great: I think I let myself get too dehydrated. I drank a lot of fluids and took a nap after breakfast and felt much better by the time we left for Arnstein to meet Thomas.



What a day it turned out to be! We met him at the Eiscafe Romina shortly before 1:00 and had drinks inside while we got to know each other a little bit and planned how we were going to spend the day. He had identified the locations I had identified on my website, consulted with another local researcher who was knowledgeable about the history of Arnstein to verify what I had discovered and mapped the route we would follow to visit each location. He himself was a walking encyclopedia of information about the town, which he shared with us throughout the tour.

I had prepared a document for Thomas showing exactly how we were related with information about Rosina Schmitt (wife of Karl Zang), her daughters Margaret and Rosina and their families and included some pictures of their life in the United States.

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026

It was another beautiful warm and sunny day – perfect weather to be outside! Arnstein is hilly, and much larger than it appears. As much as we both enjoyed the experience we were both relieved when we returned to the Eiscafe Romina at the end of the tour.

**See my [Arnstein, Bavaria, Germany webpage](#) for pictures and details about each of the locations we visited.**

We spent the hour or so remaining until our 6:00 dinner reservation nursing our drinks and filling in a few more historical details about the family and the town.

We sat outside for dinner at the Gasthaus Steinert across the street from the Eiscafe Romina, enjoying the food and the conversation. Thomas presented me with a commemorative 5 Euro Arnstein coin: I was touched.

Encountered our next credit card incident when I went to pay for the dinner: they could not get their credit card reader to boot up, so I ended up just paying with cash.

Returned to our hotel and sat outside reflecting on all that we had seen and learned over several glasses of wine.

*7,417 steps, 4 flights of stairs.*

## 31 May 2026 – Sunday

Schweinfurt & Estenfeld

The overnight rain that was forecast never materialized, but it is back in the forecast for today. We spend a leisurely morning over breakfast and will drive down to Estenfeld to meet Thomas' mother Theresa at their favorite Greek restaurant at 12:00.

The rain finally showed up just as we left, but it was not heavy and did not get in our way.

Dinner last night used up the last of our cash, so we left 20 minutes early so we could stop at the train station and get some more from the ATM there. It was a good plan, but the machine was not working so we had to scramble to try to find another one, then scramble some more to find another another one that was in a building that was not locked. We finally had success at a Post Office building, but by this time we were 10 minutes behind schedule. We warned Thomas with a text and pressed on our way.

All was good though, as we arrived at the restaurant at 12:10 just a few minutes after Thomas arrived.

There were 21 of us sitting at a long table. Thomas sat next to me which was a great help because he was the only other person there who spoke English. He has printed off a family tree highlighting all of the family members who were at the table and made introductions.

His mother seemed genuinely pleased that so many people had showed up to help celebrate her birthday, and Thomas said that she was especially honored that we made the effort to attend too.

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026

We gave her a card and small box of really nice chocolates we bought with us from Dallas for the occasion.

We both ordered Souvlaki and drank water (although Kathleen did succumb to the offer of a shot of ouzo that restaurant owner passed around after the meal.

The arrangement would have made conversation would have been difficult if we had all spoken the same language, so other than Thomas' conversation was impossible. We were the first to leave (intentionally on our part – we did not want Thomas to be forced to baby-sit us the entire time).

He walked us out to our car and seemed genuinely moved about having the opportunity to meet us. I felt the same way: there is something special about meeting family members, no matter how distant the connection.

We drove back to Schweinfurt, got gas, then returned to the hotel to change into some more comfortable clothes. There was prediction of rain in the forecast, but the weather was partly sunny and quite pleasant. We walked up to the Rathaus square and found an outdoor restaurant (Italian) that sold ice cream and provide snacks with our wine. It was fun to sit there, reflect on the past few days and watch the locals come and go.



We returned to the hotel to get packed for tomorrow's journey to Cologne, then went down for wine on the terrace, followed by dinner inside (it had started to rain a bit). I had some Asparagus soup, and we split a club sandwich before returning to our room for the night. I went to bed, but Kathleen sat up for a while longer and enjoyed one last glass of wine.

*4,503 steps, 2 flights of stairs*

## 1 June 2026 – Monday

### Schweinfurt -> Cologne

Had our first “wake up to an alarm” moment of this trip when my alarm went off at 6:30. Cleaned up, had breakfast, checked out, drove the short distance to the train station, parked, returned the car (that couldn't have been any easier: just walked into the office and handed them the keys!), got over to platform 6 and waited for our 9:30 train to Wurzburg.

Arrived there at 10:00, found the platform for our next train (also #6), then found out that our 10:26 departure had been delayed until 11:00. It was yet another sunny, beautiful day (about 70 degrees), so we just waited on the platform and enjoyed the fresh air.

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026



The train ride was pleasant. We were in 1<sup>st</sup> class on an ICE train. We were offered some coffee (although we had to pay for it: I had assumed it was just part of the 1<sup>st</sup> class service). The route ran along the bank of the Rhine River, and we were treated with the view of many steeply sloped vineyards and castles along the way.

We arrived in Cologne and had a fundamental disagreement about the best way to walk to the hotel (the Hilton) out in front of the station. Spent much longer discussing the issue that it took to reach the hotel. I understand the concern... Kathleen's back is really bothering her and she did not want to walk any further than necessary.

Once we were settled in our room, we headed out to eat a late lunch/early dinner. Settled on Peters Brahas – had several Kolch's in the outdoor beer garden across the street, then walked across the street to the restaurant. It was not very crowded, and we got a nice, quiet table in the corner. My pork was delicious, and Kathleen enjoyed her sauerbraten-like beef.



Cologne is quite a change from Schweinfurt. It is a large city, with lots of traffic and many people, many of them apparently from the middle east, but the Hilton leans towards American travelers.

The city also seems to be a popular stop for the river boat companies as saw several large boats docked at the river and have seen several leader-led tour groups walking around.

Finished off with ice cream near the river, then several glasses of wine at an outdoor café before heading back to the hotel where we had a few more drinks before heading to our 5<sup>th</sup> floor room.

*7,278 steps, 1 flight of stairs.*

## 2 June 2026 – Tuesday

### Cologne

Woke up around 7:00, had breakfast (a large buffet with many choices) before walking to the nearby train station. Figured out our train route to Duisburg with the help the DB ticket office, purchased them and then boarded the 9:58 IC.

## **Germany and Belgium May/June 2026**

Kathleen has had a great deal of difficulty navigating the Archive website: We could not reach it all from Dallas due to some kind of configuration issue they were having on their server), and she is understandably anxious about being effective when we arrive. She is not optimistic about her chances of finding the marriage record she really wants to have. We'll see...

The weather promises to be uncooperative as well... rain is in the forecast (not just for today – for the entire time we will be in Cologne).

The tram we needed to ride to the archive once we arrived in Duisburg was not obvious. We got some directions at the TI outside the station, but still had trouble finding it, and then had even more trouble buying the tickets. We found the correct platform, but it arrived at the far end from where we were sitting and we almost missed seeing it entirely, but we made it. Once we arrived at the stop (the 3<sup>rd</sup> one) it took us a bit more time to figure out where the archive was, but we eventually got there, put all our stuff in a locker and entered the viewing room.

There was only one staff person working when we arrived, and we had to wait ~10 minutes while he finished helping people who were already there (about 8 people got there before we arrived). He tried (and failed) to get me registered so I could have access to a terminal too, but he did get Kathleen set up to view the images she needed to search.

More staff arrived and we got help from someone who spoke better English and seemed to be much more knowledgeable. He quickly got me logged into another terminal next to Kathleen so I could help her with her search.

He also helped us understand how the Cologne files were organized. There were very many smaller courts that handled marriage records that (over time) folded into other courts. As a result, we had about 50 sets of records to search through to find the marriage record Kathleen was hoping to find. We divided the list of courts between us and began looking: it did not take long before I found it!

They have very strict rules about photographing images (you can't) and getting a digital image (that you can do, for a fee, but it takes a few days for them find and send them to you in email). All they were able to do was provide us with a printed copy of the record (also for a fee).

I thought some of them were going to faint when I started to take a picture of for printout, but they all looked the other way, and I did it so I could run it through MyHeritage's Scribe AI tool to get a translation for Kathleen.

Kathleen also found some relevant birth records that confirmed some of what the record revealed and provided some death dates and locations.

Our knowledgeable helper was a great help. We needed to find some information in the Cologne records, but they are recorded in very many volumes (about 4 for each year). He suggested that we use an index available on microfilm to try to narrow down the date range of interest, which we did. Those records were not digitized, so we needed to wait for the staff to pull then actual books for us.

We decided to take a break while they retrieved the books and set out to find somewhere to have lunch. Walked about 20 minutes to reach the central part of the city, then spent more time trying to find a restaurant that Google Maps swore actually existed, but we were unable to find it in the real world. We settled for a pizza at a covered outdoor table. As we sat down the sky opened up – it was

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026

a real downpour, complete with thunder and lightning. Luckily for us it had all passed when it came time to walk back to the archive.

We found the last of the records (which we could photograph because they were not digitized, I guess) and left about 3:30. They promised to email the JPEG images as soon as Kathleen received and paid the invoice.



Scribe AI was a game changer for us... it was almost like having someone who could read and translate the records sitting next to us the whole time.

We rode the tram back to the train station but had a lot of trouble buying a ticket to return to Cologne. There was no ticket office, and the ticket machine insisted that we provide a PIN for the credit card we were using (which I do not have). Kathleen ended up buying the ticket using her app and charging it to our debit card.

The ride back only took about 40 minutes (on an ICE train – 1<sup>st</sup> class again), and it was a short walk to the hotel. We elected to eat in the hotel bar (I had a salad, Kathleen had a hamburger) followed by a few drinks before we returned to our room.

*10,048 steps, 2 flights of stairs*

## 3 June 2026 – Wednesday

### Cologne

Since we did not need to return to the archive we decided to make this a leisure day.

For forecast for today was for rain, but now says that it is just going to be cool (in the 60's) and partly cloudy, with more rain possible overnight.

I elected to try to get into the nearby massage parlor to a much-needed Thai massage. I got conflicting information about the opening time (Google Maps said 11:00, but their website said 10:00). Google was correct. Getting in was not obvious – it was in a multi-tenant building, and I had to ring the doorbell to unlock the door to get inside. The massage itself featured a lot more stretching than I am used to, but I definitely felt better when I walked out!

Kathleen had discovered that the death record we had obtained from the archive was a summary of the original. She contacted the archiving in Heidelberg (I think) and they were able to send her an image of the original. From that record we got the address in Cologne where he was living when he died (31 Venloer Strasse). After confirming the location, we walked there (about a 25 minute walk from the hotel) and took a few pictures.

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026



It was located a very short distance from a city park that had a restaurant, so we walked there and each had a bowl of Asparagus soup (it has green and white asparagus and was delicious) and a few drinks before walking back to the hotel.

Rested for a while before heading out for drinks and dinner. We looked at (and rejected) several places before settling into one of the restaurants in the Heumarkt that had covered outdoor seating. While we were enjoying our 1<sup>st</sup> glass of wine it began to rain quite heavily. We were lucky to be seated at the center of one of the large umbrellas where the rain did not bother us, so we sat there sipping our wine and watching the rest of the world react to the sudden downpour.

We had a nice conversation with one of the waiters about the situation in the US with Trump... He was encouraging – said that most people in the rest of the world realize that most decent Americans do not support his views or actions. I must admit that I have been ashamed to even admit that I lived in the US. He made me feel a lot better.

Decided not to eat there though and headed back to the hotel. Arrived at the bar 3 minutes before the kitchen closed so just ordered and split a pizza for dinner.

*11,476 steps, 2 flights of stairs*

## 4 June 2026 – Thursday

### Cologne

We made plans (with some help from ChatGPT) for what looks like a very rainy day in Cologne over breakfast.

1. Cathedral
2. Roman Praetorium
3. Cologne City Museum

When we arrived at the Cathedral we discovered a large outdoor mass in progress. I asked a clerk in the Cathedral store, and she said that the Cathedral would be open to the public when the mass was complete. What she failed to mention was the fact that the outdoor mass was going to be followed by a mass inside the Cathedral... A priest finally emerged and announced that the Cathedral would be open at 2:30.

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026

Discovered that the Roman Praetorium was closed for renovations and so set out for the Cologne City Museum.

This turned out to be a really interesting museum. We learned a lot about the history of the city and its culture. All of the exhibits were in German and English, so it was easy to take it all in. Our weather luck continued as it apparently rained again while we were in the museum.

We stopped off at a bakery on the way back to the Cathedral for coffee and macaroons (Kathleen) and a sandwich and water for me.

The Cathedral was crowded but worth the effort. It is an amazing structure inside and outside.

We next walked down to the riverfront and sat at one of the outdoor restaurants to enjoy the view and some wine. There was another torrential rainstorm while we were there. We experienced a real hassle trying to pay our bill when we were ready to leave. I told one of the waiters we were ready to pay: He said he would be right back, but after 10 minutes or so nobody appeared. I stood up for several more minutes (no luck). When that did not work, I approached several other waiters who were standing around with cash in my hand. That finally got someone's attention, and our waiter finally appeared. I reluctantly ended up giving him a tip because he did not have enough change and I did not want to wait any longer.

We walked back towards the hotel and stopped in at the Fruh Bauhaus Am Dom to eat: It was crowded, noisy and challenging. It is a large building with many rooms and hallways with tables everywhere and nobody available to help us find a table. We ended up at a table for 2 (it had a "reserved" sign on it, but a passing waiter said it was OK for us to sit there). We thoroughly enjoyed the food and watching the many different groups of people who surrounded us.



The evening ended with the now familiar walk back to our hotel bar where we stopped for a night-cap before retiring.

*6,524 steps, 4 floors of steps*

## 5 June 2026 – Friday

### Cologne

Today is Kathleen's chance to follow in the footsteps of her family! She has mapped out the locations for the homes and Churches that were part of the Reuter family here in Cologne, so we set out after breakfast to see what remains.

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026

She had laid it all out in a Google map route created with the help of Chat GPT, but that soon proved to be a bit of a bust, so we took over using conventional Google maps.

The church at Quatermarkt 4 has been preserved / stabilized but needs a great deal of work before anyone will be able to do more than look inside to view what remains through the gates on the street. None the less, we were surprised to find that we were not the only people performing the pilgrimage to see what remains.

We next walked to the area where AUGUSTINERSTRASSE 1817 had stood. The area was once a large monastery that had been destroyed in the time of Napoleon. Today it is a busy commercial area with many businesses and hotels.

AUGUSTINERPLATZ 14 was reportedly in the same area but neither location was recognizable today.

A short walk brought us to the NEUMARKT plaza and House Number 33, which we were able to locate: A 5-story building - apparently apartments above a store front, and obviously not original to the time of her family.



The plaza was being set up for a wine fest which will take place this weekend. It apparently was scheduled to open later in the day, so we walked to a nearby restaurant and sat outside and had their lunch special (potato soup, salmon, rice and a salad).

We then navigated to the St. Mauritius church where many/most of the children were baptized. It appeared to be getting ready to hold a small wine-festival of its own in the walkway behind the church. Unfortunately, the church itself was locked so we did not get the chance to see the interior.

MAURITIUSSTEINWEG was just a few blocks down the street. Today it is a large multi-story building on a busy street across from a large, wooded park.

We were both a bit tired by this point, as were our phones - both were nearly out of battery by this time - but mustered enough energy to get us through the 1-mile walk back to our hotel, where we both relaxed and recovered from our exertion.

I identified a steak house (BLACK ANGUS) that got good reviews, so we walked there, sat at an outdoor table (they had turned the heater on which made it quite toasty) and enjoyed a good meal (chicken for K, steak for me) and good service.

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026

4 men sat at the table next to us. It was easy to tell they were from Ireland. Turns out they were friends on a bike trip along the Rhine. One was from Galway, a town that Kathleen was familiar with. We had a nice chat before heading back to our hotel bar for one last drink before heading up to our room for a well-deserved rest.

*15,736 steps, 4 floors of stairs.*

## Saturday Jun 6

### Cologne

Woke up to a day that promises to be cloudy (but no rain) and a bit warm (71°). A good day to celebrate a birthday. We have a dinner cruise scheduled for this evening but will need to figure out what to do for the rest of the day.

Kathleen had been frustrated by the web interface used to schedule massages here at the hotel when she looked last night. I looked again this morning using my iPad and it looked a lot easier, so we scheduled an 80-minute massage for her at 3:00.

Kathleen had the excellent idea of walking across the bridge to visit the city on the other side of the river, so we walked across the HOHENZOLLERN rail/pedestrian bridge, then walked down to the DEUTZER BRÜCKE bridge, and crossed back onto "our" side of the river.



As we came down from the DEUTZER BRÜCKE bridge Kathleen spotted a WC that she needed to use. We managed to get the door to open but felt like we were being filmed in a comedy TV show when it came to getting the door to close. It teased her a few times by starting to close, then stubbornly opening up again. We finally "solved" the problem by having me stand in the doorway blocking the view while Kathleen answered the call of nature.

We then settled into an outdoor cafe for some Bruschetta and a few glasses of wine. Our waiter was a former Rugby player - semi-pro - career sidelined by a severe shoulder injury.

After we finished our wine, we walked back to the hotel and arrived just in time for Kathleen's 3:00 massage appointment. I went back to the room and caught up with important Social Media information until she returned to the room, when we both relaxed until it was time to walk down to the waterfront to catch our dinner boat cruise which departs at 8:00.

Mild panic ensued when Kathleen realized that she had left her raincoat somewhere... We decided that she had probably left it behind when she got her massage. Fortunately, some kind soul had dropped it off at the front desk and we were able to retrieve it.

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026

It was a little further to dock 2 than we estimated, so it was 7:35 or 7:40 by the time we arrived at our ship. We were seated at table #5 with four German women out for a night out. They spoke very little English so we all pretty much kept to ourselves.

The ship sailed promptly at 8:00 and headed upstream. The cruise was interrupted by a woman who apparently fell & injured herself which caused the boat to return to the dock so she could be taken to a hospital by an ambulance that met the ship at the dock.

Dinner was a buffet for dinner - Salad, Pork, Ravioli and the usual trimmings. Wine & beer was included in the meal, and we ended up going through 2 bottles of very drinkable ship line branded white wine.

They cleared up the serving tables in the middle of the floor, and a DJ began playing music which enticed a handful of our shipmates to get up and dance.

We watched for a while but ended the cruise up on the top deck enjoying the cool fresh air and admiring the skyline as we returned to the dock. I took many pictures, a few of which seen to have turned out well.



Skipped the bar on our return & retired for the day.

*12,543 steps, 10 floors of stairs climbed*

## Sunday June 7

### Last full day in Cologne

Slept well, ate, and kept busy in the room until it was time to leave for our 11:30 guided tour which left from the Old Market.

We were the only ones on the tour, and our guide was an amazing resource for information about Cologne, the impact of the War and the history of Jews.

One of the buildings he showed us was a massive concrete structure that was erected near the train station during WWII as a bomb shelter. Demolishing it apparently was considered problematic, so it was “re-skinned” to look like a modern building. It was one of the few structures that escaped damage or destruction during the war. We also toured a building used by the Gestapo to hold and torture people accused of crimes against the regime.

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026



We did a lot of walking and had great conversations and finally parted ways around 3:00.

Tired & thirsty, we returned to MAMA LEONE'S restaurant on the riverfront for Mozzarella Caprice and several glasses of wine while waiting for our 6:00 reservation at Peters Brauhaus. It was nearly empty when we arrived but got steadily busy while I enjoyed another Pork Knuckle w/ Fried Potatoes & Fried Cabbage & Kathleen had Sauerbraten with mashed Potatoes and Red Cabbage.

Encountered another kerfuffle using my credit card to pay - It said it needed a Pin. I guessed (wrongly) and it rejected the payment. Fortunately, our waitress knew what to do and had me try again using my Apple Wallet and it went through with a huzzah.

Witnessed a rally of some kind outside the cathedral. Many people with flags: US, Israeli, Iran, Italy and probably a few others we could not identify.



Decided to return to our room to get our packing underway as we have a 9:42 train to catch in the morning. Will cap the evening off with a few drinks at the bar.

*11,334 steps, 3 flights of stairs*

## Monday June 8

### To Liege (and Beyond)

Woke up at the insistence of a 6:30 alarm... Enjoyed our last breakfast buffet in Cologne, checked out and walked the now familiar route to the train station.

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026

We were seated in 2nd class on the train, along with a group of students on their way (I think) to Paris. They had a chore finding a seat and getting their luggage settled, but they managed.

We both slept a bit on what should have been a 1-hour trip to Liege. The train departed late, and was delayed further on the way, and we arrived at and departed from Liege before either of us realized that we had reached our destination. It was another 30 minutes to Brussels. Kathleen bought us tickets back to Liege using her on-line app. According to the sign on board the train we should have had 10-15 minutes to get to the platform (3 - we arrived on 5) for the train back but arrived much later than predicted and barely had time to climb on board before our train departed.

The 2nd train back to Leipzig was a local, so it took a little longer to return, but it was not very crowded, and we enjoyed looking at the countryside as it flashed past.

Had a little trouble figuring out how to purchase the tram tickets (the machine in the station only registered funds on a card) but got past that hurdle and were soon on our crowded tram to the hotel. It travels through the old part of the city following a very twisting path. The buildings appear old (the city was not damaged much in either war). It is a striking difference from Cologne: the city appears to have retained its historic layout and style of building.

Our tram stop was a few steps away from where one of Kathleen's relatives had lived (very near the tourist information center).



We found our hotel without much effort, but getting inside was a bit of a challenge. It has a large door that was locked. Finally noticed the label on one of the many buttons ("Ring bell for entry") and were granted access.

It is a very nice, boutique hotel, and they kindly gave us a room on the ground floor (it has no elevator).

We immediately set out to find a store to purchase the UK power adapters we had managed to lose (quickly accomplished - 5£ each). The hotel is on a narrow, twisting alley that leads to a major car-free tourist focused street with bars and restaurants (and many other businesses) and we settled into a nearby bar where we enjoyed several rounds of wine served with potato chips which were most welcome as we'd had no lunch.

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026



We ID's a highly recommended restaurant (As Ouhes, which was only a few steps away): what a meal! Kathleen had the local specialty: Meatballs in gravy, served with French Fries and a salad. I opted for a fabulous chicken dish (Belgian Chicken Vol-au-Vent with Mushroom Cream Sauce) baked in a creamy cheesy sauce and topped with the most flaky pastry imaginable (kind of like a chicken pot pie, only a million times more tasty than any pot pie I have ever eaten!).

We took the remains of the bottle of Sancerre wine back to our hotel and arrived just as it was starting to rain. We opened the windows in our room overlooking the center courtyard and enjoyed the wine, food, and even the sound of the falling rain and the pleasure of each other's company at the end of an enjoyable day

4,059 steps, 10 stairs climbed

## Tuesday Jan 9

### In Liege

Slept very well - did not get up until 8:30!

The lights in our room deserve special mention... There are two (mounted on the wall) that are blinking on and off - don't know why. All of the lights (of which there are many) are controlled by a few switches, so you are required to repeatedly press buttons to cycle through the pre-defined options to arrive at the one that works for you. On top of that the light that flashes every 10-15 seconds in the smoke detector is the brightest red light I have ever seen - I even noticed it with my eyes closed!

Breakfast was another buffet, just a little scaled back. It is served in the basement; the steps down are only a few steps away from our room. The buffet itself (with ~ 6 or so tables) was down yet another flight of ~ 6 steps.

I did not read the signs - thought I was warming up a hardboiled egg in a very cool hot water setup. Turns out I was starting with a raw egg, which was very runny and un-cooked when I cracked open. My bad...

Plotted today's plan over coffee...

Walked back down to the house(s) where Kathleen's family had lived (near the TI) and took pictures from every angle.

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026

Went into the TI and found that they had a historical map. I thought it was just a display and photographed the heck out of it, but it turned out that it was also available for purchase (~ 20" x 30") so Kathleen bought a copy as well as a book and a few other gifts.

We dropped the purchased items back at the nearby hotel, returned to the TI to retrieve the hat I left there, then walked along the pedestrian zone to the train stop. Bought a day pass, rode to the train station, then purchased tickets to Visé (about a 20 minute train ride), another town where Kathleen's ancestors lived. It was a busy little town. We stopped at a bistro and had lunch, walked to see the church where Kathleen believes her ancestors worshiped.



We stopped and bought some European-style mitten-like wash cloths Kathleen likes (which we managed to lose somewhere between the church and the train) and returned to Liege. Kathleen ID'd a store in Liege that probably sells them. It was located right at the tram stop before the one near our hotel - and purchased some more.

Walked in a light rain back to our hotel. We noticed (even though we had walked past it several times) some memorial markers in the alley near our hotel commemorating the victims of the Holocaust. We have not noticed/seen any others anywhere in Liege.

We rested briefly before heading back to the same outdoor bar we enjoyed last night. We had planned to eat dinner there, but the service was not as good: no coasters for our drinks, no chips - even though people around us were served soon with their drinks. Plus, the menu did not appeal to us, and (finally) the inside seating area was noisy, crowded and unappealing. So we walked the short distance to where we ate last night (As Ouhes).

It was cool. Nobody was sitting at the outside tables (we did not intend to sit there anyway), but the inside seating was huge and full of people. We were seated towards the rear in an area that was not (yet) crowded and enjoyed soup (K) and smoked salmon (M) and began with bottle of Sancerre.

The room did soon fill up when a group of ~ 20 people obviously working or meeting together arrived and were served the local meatball specialty.

We opted to split the grilled salmon and finished the meal off with some delicious profiteroles served with a chocolate sauce to die for.

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026



Had problems paying the bill. Needed to give a PIN for my Citi Card - I tried what I guessed it might be, but it was rejected. I tried to use the Chase credit card, but it too was rejected. I finally tried the debit card (which always requires a PIN in the US) and it went right through without requiring a PIN. Go figure.

Mystified but full, we were grateful that it was only a short walk back to our hotel.

*10,409 steps, 2 flights of stairs*

## Wednesday June 10

### Liege -> Frankfurt

Travel day! Had breakfast, finished packing, and stowed our bags in the hotel lobby.

Decided to spend the morning at the Archeoforum, and we were both really happy that we did. It is an amazing underground archeological site, buried right under the Place Saint-Lambert. We have passed over and through this plaza many times on our visit without knowing that a phenomenal archeological site had been (mostly) uncovered and then enclosed again. It was just an otherworldly experience to be walking through the ruins of 4 churches knowing that hundreds of people, cars and trams were passing just a few feet over our heads.



We then walked the short distance to the MUSEUM of WALLOON LIFE, but we might as well just slipped into a cafe for all of the enjoyment we got out of it. It wasn't particularly well organized. None of the signage was in English. They did have QR codes we could scan to listen to an English

## Germany and Belgium May/June 2026

explanation, but they were kind of boring and the exhibits themselves were not all that interesting. We even decided that the cafeteria was not worth the effort.

Settled instead into another street- front bar/restaurant and enjoyed quiche, salad & diet cokes.



It was a short walk back to our hotel where we retrieved our bags, walked to the train station and are now on the 3:14 IC 17 train to Frankfurt.

The hotel (Am FRANKFURT) is a four-minute walk from the train station, and overlooks a street full of people, vehicles and trams. A tram passes by every 15-60 seconds. Our room is adequate: it has 2 chairs, but (apparently) no A/C. Fortunately it has large windows that open, so we were able to cool the room down quickly.

It rained (hard) shortly after we arrived. Decided we would just have dinner at the Irish pub next door (O'Reilly's). The rain had stopped by the time we got there, but the outdoor tables and chairs were wet, so we went inside for drinks and pub food (Fish & Chips for K, Buffalo wings for me).

By the time we finished eating they had dried off the outdoor seating, so we went out there to enjoy the fresh air and one last drink before retiring for the last night of our vacation.



*6,349 steps, 5 floors of steps*

Germany and Belgium  
May/June 2026

## Thursday Jun 11

### Going Home

Ate, checked out and walked through the cool morning air to the train station. Found our platform, but Kathleen had trouble buying our tickets using her app. She got one for sure, but we didn't know if she managed to pay for the second one. They did check for tickets once the train departed. Lucky for us, the conductor took pity on Kathleen as she was trying to pull the tickets (ticket?) up on her phone and he just moved on so we will never know.

Getting through immigration at the airport was a long, drawn-out process. We went through the automated system that scanned our passports, took our pictures and scanned our fingerprints (just as we did when we arrived), but still had to stand in a very long line of people to wait for an agent to look at our passports anyway. Got our stamp of approval and were free to head to the plane.



Had just about an hour to go before it was time to board and begin the long (10:15) flight home. We both had aisle exit row seats on the Boeing 787-8, but were on opposite sides of the plane.

It was great to have the leg room, but my seat area was quite cold. Despite that I managed to doze my way back to Dallas. Took the Orange line back to Mockingbird station, then the Blue line to White Rock where Cliff met us for the final leg home.

*6,508 steps, 5 floors of stairs*