

Leon & Audrey's world trip 08/09

Prologue - The flight of the lead balloon

Those who have been paying attention will think that this trip seems to have been being planned for an extraordinarily long time. And you would be right.

We originally planned to head off in 2006, the year we both turned 40. Not because we turned 40, but simply because that is when we had it planned. But as they say, the best laid plans of mice and men....

You may wonder about the title of this part of the trip. Well, anyone who watches Mythbusters (and if you don't you should, it's a great program) will know that it is possible to make a lead balloon fly, but it is extremely difficult, though hugely satisfying in the end. That's how it feels with this trip. We have a long list of problems we met along the way, had to overcome and now, just before we head off, we are determined to go and have a good time if it kills us (well not quite, but you get the idea).



Mythbusters flying their lead balloon (hey, I never said it was small, but neither is our trip!).

The delays, worries and problems started with the death of Audrey's grandmother. She has been with Audrey on every trip she has made to Europe, and is the tie to Audrey's relatives in Germany. It was a sad time and returning to Germany reminds us both she is gone.

This was of course followed by me being made redundant from Telstra where he had worked for 17 years. It was this that actually forced a change to the timing of the trip. We were just about to start planning flights and buying tickets, so I suppose it's better that we hadn't actually spent any money on it yet. So we waited while I found another job and spent enough time in it to be comfortable with saying "I want to go away for 3 months". This is not really something you can tell people in a job interview, though I did mention in the first week that I would be taking 3 months leave in two years time. My new boss laughed.

Then things went smoothly for a year and a bit. We planned flights, booked tickets, organised new passports and all those things associated with travel. It's fun this bit. The planning, the anticipation.

It caught me completely unawares when my gall bladder decided to play up. Not just with gall stones, no that would be too easy. I had to get gall stone pancreatitis. If only it had been that simple though. My liver decided to go out in sympathy and lower my blood clotting factors so they couldn't operate (the doctors worried I would bleed to death on the operating table. I said I wouldn't but they didn't believe me). To cut a long story short, my liver got better, they operated and I made a 100% recovery with no ill effects and no problems with my diet (a common problem with gall bladder removals).

The next scare was completely our own fault. We should have known better than to go to the doctor for a check up this close to travelling. Funny results in Audrey's blood tests. So she had some more done. Still funny. Off for an ultrasound. Nothing conclusive. The doctor decides it could be related to being overweight and suggests she loose some weight. Well, we were working on this anyway (for both of us) after spending a month on a fat free diet while waiting for my gall bladder to be removed.

Only a few more worries. My eldest daughter is now planning to probably move to Melbourne while we are away. This makes it very hard for us to do anything to help. The stock market and the dollar going in the wrong direction. And finally the room we were going to stay in at Audrey's cousin's place in Germany is no longer available and we need to find another place to stay. We are still going anyway.

So that is the background. Now to the good stuff, the trip. We are travelling for just over 3 months, visiting 4 continents (or 5 depending on how you count them) and flying on 20 planes all up. The 20 flights includes going to my sister's wedding in September 2009 and a quick stop over in Darwin to visit Audrey's cousin. The logistics are dreadfully confusing, but the map on the next page will help. The plan behind all the apparently crazy routing is to become platinum frequent flyers by the time we arrive back home.

Apart from the cities where the planes land, we are running around Europe with a 2 month Eurail pass. This is very much adlib and we will decide what we do when we are there (I'm sure this will shock the people I work with who think I plan too much). We are hoping to head up to Norway and possibly take the Hurtigruten ferry up the coast and then come back down via train, travel to Hungary and visit the village my father was born in and generally have a good time.

People I work with want me to get pictures of myself in cliché situations like with a Geisha in Japan, drinking a huge beer stein in Germany and doing things in Amsterdam that are only legal there. We will have to see what we manage as neither of us normally end up in the pictures I take, but any we do manage to take will end up in our periodic posts of our adventures.

And now all that is left is the final packing, the last bit of house cleaning and the trip to the airport. What will happen over the next 3 months as we travel to exotic locations? Can we escape Istanbul without buying a carpet? Will we be run down by a New York taxi driver for not tipping? I'm looking forward to finding out.

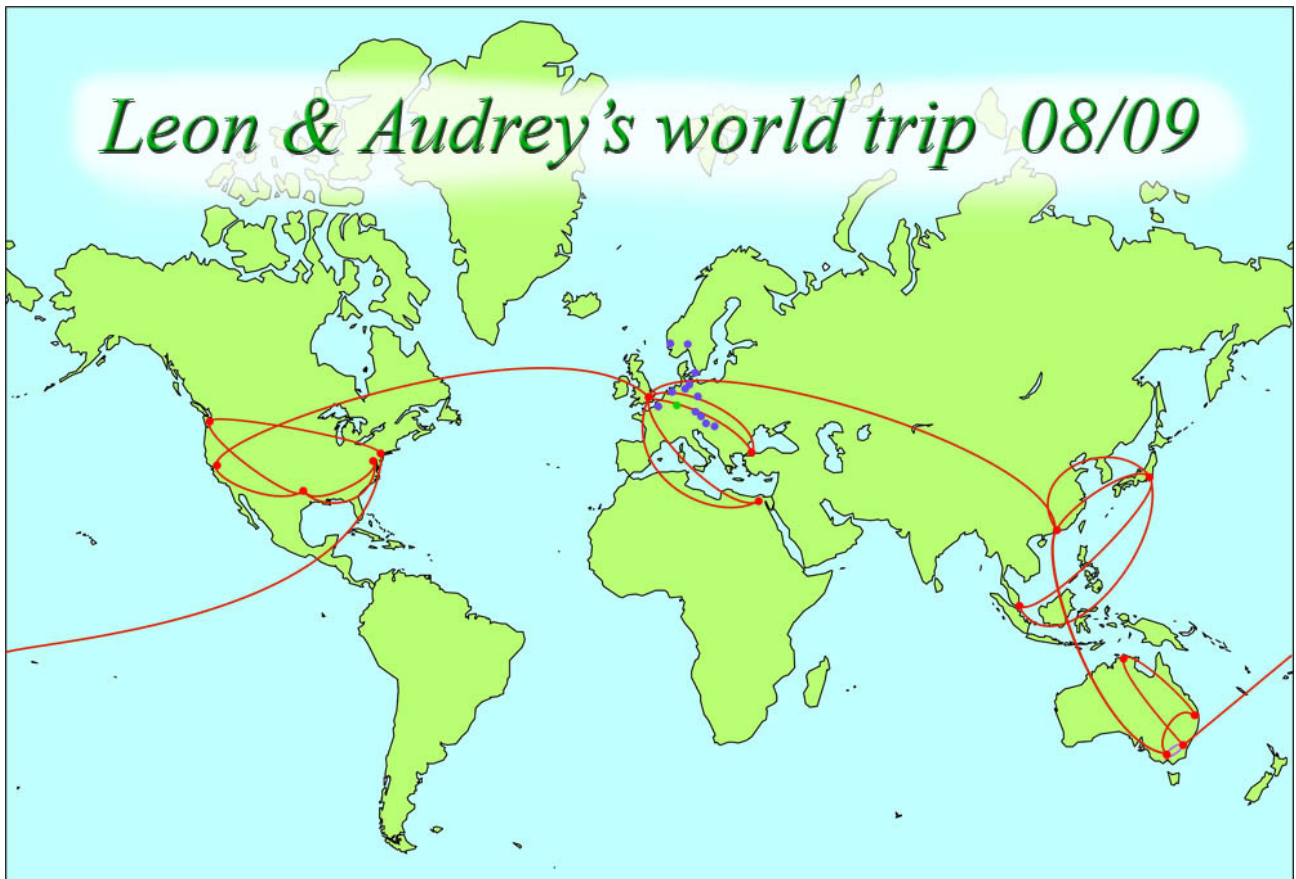
Our Itinerary

Arrive	City
Sun 02-Nov-08	Tokyo
Wed 05-Nov-08	Singapore
Fri 07-Nov-08	Hong Kong
Wed 12-Nov-08	London & Europe
Sat 17-Jan-09	Cairo
Tue 20-Jan-09	Istanbul
Fri 23-Jan-09	San Francisco
Mon 26-Jan-09	Washington
Fri 30-Jan-09	Seattle
Sun 01-Feb-09	New York
Tue 05-Feb-09	Melbourne

European cities we are likely to visit include*:

- Düsseldorf
- Berlin
- Köln
- Lübeck
- Vienna
- Salzberg
- Budapest
- Amsterdam
- Aachen
- And plenty more

* We may not get to any or all of these, it will depend on how we feel on any particular day.



Flights

Date	Airports	Cities	Flight	Dep	Arr
Sat 01-Nov-08	MEL-HKG	Melbourne – Hong Kong	QF 29	23:59	5:50
Sun 02-Nov-08	HKG-NRT	HongKong – Tokyo	CX 504	9:05	14:05
Wed 05-Nov-08	NRT-SIN	Tokyo – Singapore	JL 719	10:55	17:35
Thu 06-Nov-08	SIN-NRT	Singapore – Tokyo	JL 710	23:00	6:40
Fri 07-Nov-08	NRT-HKG	Tokyo – Hong Kong	CX 509	9:15	13:30
Wed 12-Nov-08	HKG-LHR	Hong Kong – London	QF 29	8:00	13:30
Sat 17-Jan-09	LHR-CAI	London - Cairo	BA 155	16:25	23:05
Tue 20-Jan-09	CAI-LHR	Cairo – London	BA 154	8:40	12:00
Tue 20-Jan-09	LHR-IST	London – Istanbul	BA 680	16:00	21:45
Fri 23-Jan-09	IST-LHR	Istanbul – London	BA 675	9:05	11:20
Fri 23-Jan-09	LHR-SFO	London – San Francisco	BA 287	14:25	17:20
Mon 26-Jan-09	SFO-DFW	San Francisco – Dallas	AA 1306	7:20	12:55
Mon 26-Jan-09	DFW-BWI	Dallas – Washington	AA 1298	16:35	20:25
Fri 30-Jan-09	DCA-DFW	Washington – Dallas	AA 1107	6:00	8:35
Fri 30-Jan-09	DFW-SEA	Dallas – Seattle	AA 529	9:55	12:20
Sun 01-Feb-09	SEA-JFK	Seattle – New York	AA 268	7:45	15:50
Tue 03-Feb-09	JFK-SYD	New York - Sydney	QF 108	18:40	9:15
Thu 05-Feb-09	SYD-MEL	Sydney – Melbourne *			
Thu 03-Sep-09	MEL-SYD	Melbourne – Sydney *			
Thu 03-Sep-09	SYD-DRW	Sydney – Darwin	QF 842	10:45	14:55
Fri 04-Sep-09	DRW-BNE	Darwin – Brisbane	QF 825	13:35	17:45
Fri 11-Sep-09	BNE-MEL	Brisbane - Melbourne	QF 631	16:50	19:15

* Not part of the around the world ticket, but it lets us add in the Darwin and Brisbane legs for the cost of a red e-deal between Sydney and Melbourne.