

## Leon & Audrey's world trip 08/09

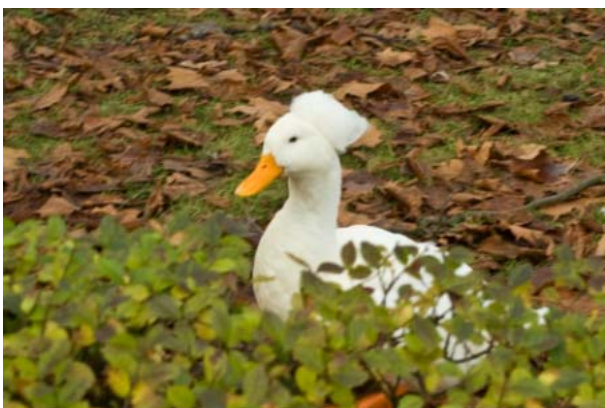
### Part 17 –Round and about

Got up and thought about what to do. We have plans for Saturday, Sunday and next week, so how to spend Friday. We thought about going to Aachen, but we really needed to do some shopping, so we started with that. Or more to the point following up a lead we got from some bi-cycle couriers about where to buy Ortlieb bags.

The problem with living in Australia is that you can't get everything there. Even with the Internet. But you can find out they exist. So we know that these bags exist, but can't buy them and here we are in Germany the home of Ortlieb. Specifically we are after a water carrying bag with a tap on the bottom. Anyway we followed the directions from the bi-cycle couriers and found the Sack & Pack store. It has lots of interesting stuff and the staff knew the exact bag we are after, but they didn't have any in stock. There are now two on order that should arrive before we leave. Mission accomplished.

We also needed some more sausage (or cold deli meats for the non Germans reading this) that we eat on Audrey's favourite Hinkel bread rolls for breakfast and most other meals we happen to at home for (this is standard German fare). Audrey had been wanting to visit the specific shop near where her great-aunt used to live that she remembers from previous visits to Germany. So we hopped on another couple of trains (after dropping in to another supermarket) in search of sausage. We did find the shop, bought the sausage and headed home with out bounty.

It was too late to head for Aachen at this stage so we headed to Schloss Benrath instead. This is an old summer residence that originally belonged to 2 Electors (people who elected the new king) (who were also husband and wife). It is a very symmetrical building, with a his side (right) and a hers side (left). They apparently did not like each other. The inside of the building is beautifully done with marble and parquet floors. There are two hidden floors (no windows visible from the outside of the building) that are for servants and hidden doors to allow the servants to come and go without being seen. The kitchens are in one of the wing buildings which are connected by underground passages – she did not like the kitchen smells.



The ducks here wear shower caps.



Schloss Benrath and the ornamental lake in front of it.



Though they owned it for 30 years the original 2 spent a total of 11 days there (separately, not together). Unfortunately cameras are not allowed, so I only have the exterior pictures. The wing buildings are now used for museums. One European gardens. The other natural history, which was quite interesting. Not a computer in sight for their displays or interactive activities.

The moon was just rising as we left the museum. A harvest moon looking large on the horizon. The moon is at its closest point to the Earth at present and put on a spectacular display.



The local Christmas market has every stall done up like a little Schloss Benrath. I think it's getting a little carried away with the theme.



We stopped for a hot chocolate on the way back to the station. The temperature had dropped to 2 degrees or less and we felt in need of a warm up. I can recommend the hot chocolates at the Cafe Benrath. Very nice and reasonably priced (Audrey thinks better than the Zürich hot chocolate, but I think not quite as nice). They have nice looking cakes too, but we didn't try them.

Saturday was a quiet day spent with Audrey's cousin Grit and her partner Peter. We spent a very enjoyable afternoon talking about marine life (they are keen divers), politics and various other subjects. Grit as you may remember from a previous episode makes glass beads. She gave me a lesson in the skills required and I made 2 glass beads myself. They were left cooling (which can take a couple of hours to make sure they don't break) and all things being well I will see them again on Christmas eve.



Grit has bought one of those put in a coin and turn the handle bubble gum machines and filled it with glass beads on a string (in plastic balls). It seems however that these machines have been gone so long from the world of children that they no longer know how to use them. I have fond memories of these machines from when I was a child and it's sad to think of a generation of children that won't know putting their coin in a slot and turning a handle to get their surprise.

Sunday was set aside for a *do* in Frankfurt. This is a yearly get together of people who are part of the Internet travel forum. The do is for the whole weekend, but we only joined for the brunch (starting at 12:00) and a tour of a private museum in the bowels of Frankfurt airport terminal 2. I spoke to one woman who flew in from the USA partly for the do and partly to keep her high status level in the frequent flyer program. Another American was at the opera the same night we were (3 balconies up) and we have met him in Australia a few times.

The brunch was a buffet with dishes like roast goose, oysters and potato soufflé and lots more besides. Very little if anything for dinner tonight! It was held in the Sheraton hotel at the airport, starting at 12:00 with drinks and dinner and drinks were accompanied by piano and a choir. It was an enjoyable afternoon of listening to stories about people's travels and how a number of non-Australians will be in Australia again before we are.

The museum is an interesting place. It is mainly storage with a few items out on display and is run by a retired pilot and his wife and a few volunteers. There are no aircraft but they have uniforms, insignia, timetables, airport records and other items going back to the beginning of civil aviation in Germany and covering the whole world. The tour was planned for an hour and lasted over 2, with people breaking up into smaller groups to look at areas interesting to them. We had a look at the Australian collection which is a bit small, but has items from small airlines that neither of us had heard of. A very interesting afternoon.

Monday 15 Dec 2008. We had a delayed start due to our heating panel in the kitchen springing a leak and having to contact our landlord (for whom we only had a day time number). We left it to him to fix (the bowel under the leak will overflow 2 hours after we left so hopefully they will get to it by then).

We had planned on going to Austria, but by the time we caught a train it was very crowded and we started thinking Belgium would be nice. Then they added to the train and we grabbed a compartment in the new section and continued to Austria. After a 10 minute delay sitting in the middle of nowhere we now don't know if we will make our connection. So we sit and watch the view and we will end up somewhere tonight. Everything is covered with frost, we may yet have a white Christmas. You can tell the houses with good insulation, they have frost on the roof.

The train has stopped again. We took out the laptops to try and get us moving again, but it hasn't worked – it should be only about 6 minutes from our destination and we would have to scramble to get out in time. It seems that someone leapt in front of the train on the next track and it made a mess on our track that the police want to look at before we can move. Ulm has a church that was the tallest building in the world at one point. It might be worthwhile seeing that – if we get moving before nighfall.

The frost has changed to snow and everything is covered in snow. It's been very nice to watch the snow covered landscape go by, but the same view for an hour is a bit much. Especially when it's just a snow covered bank on one side and another stopped train on the other. Back to cataloguing images in my database. Only 4384 to go.

OK, that worked the train is going again. We packed up and leapt off the train in Ulm, left the luggage in a locker and went looking for the cathedral. It wasn't hard to find. We saw it from the train and knew the general direction and it's kind of tall and stands out a bit. We also checked a map, but that was just to make sure.

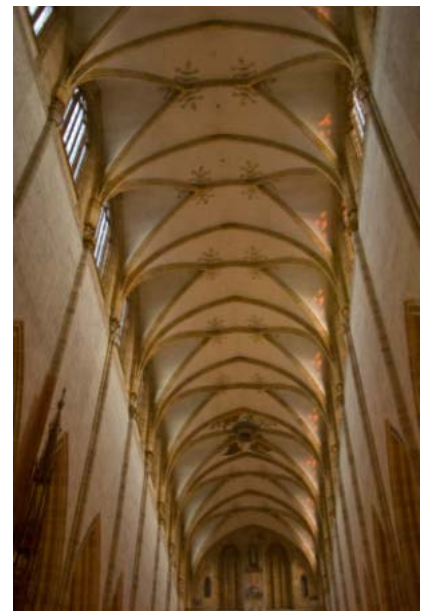
In front of the cathedral was a person with a miniature horse from the circus begging for money to keep the horse over winter. There was another person further back before the church with an alpaca and we had seen another miniature horse with owner in tow in Köln. It appears to be a bad winter for the circus.



There was also a Christmas market, but you would have expected that.

The Cathedral has 13 bells which are rung by hand. The largest weighs in at 4912kg. There are replicas of the two largest in the entrance to the cathedral and to give a scale Audrey is standing next to the largest.

When we arrived the cathedral had a light dusting of snow. Just enough to give a nice effect.



The interior was dimly lit due to the sky darkening outside. The stained glass windows all looked quite modern (a feature of a lot of German churches), one of them depicts the big bang and includes Albert Einstein amongst others.



There are also lots of carved wooden statues and busts, particularly around the choir where one side has all male carvings and the other is all female. Above are Salmia the civil and Virgil.

We headed back to the station to see what trains were now running and figure out where we would try to end the day.

And we made it to Salzburg. And the tourist information was closed. We walked out of the station and there was a hotel. We asked at the front desk if they had a map which they happily produced. It looked a bit too shiny to be in our price range but we asked and the price was reasonable, so we took a room. This may have been a mistake. See the end of the diary entry for our stay at the Ramada hotel.

The streets of the old town are narrow with market places scattered around. At this time of year, I will give you one guess as to what is in these market places. Yep, you guessed it, covered up fountains.



The fountains are covered with glass to allow people to still see them but keep the water out. The fountain on the right has a large pond in front of it that is starting to freeze. Not sure if it is just strong enough to manage or if they have been caught unprepared by the latest cold snap.

Oh, and there are Christmas markets there as well, but I thought I wouldn't have to mention that. The first market we saw for the day had mostly Christmas decorations in the stalls.



The narrow streets make it difficult to see all of a building at any time. The Christmas markets make it impossible. But it is a very pretty city.

The castle on the hill dominates the view from the city. Apart from the odd electric light, it gives a very good feel for what a medieval castle was like. It has been extended several times over the years and has a small town within its walls.



The castle church (above left). The public are allowed in but can only view the church from the rear as the rest of the church is fenced off and those wanting to pray must do so from kneeling at the back.

The passageways around the castle (above right) give a sense of permanence.

The view of the surrounding countryside from up here is marvelous.

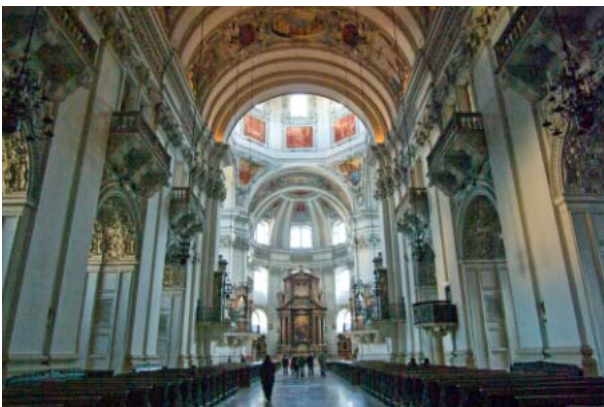


We came back down from the castle the same way we went up, by funicular railway. It is a very short but very steep ride. We headed off to the city's churches in the hopes of getting light coming in the windows.

The Franziskanerkirche can be best viewed from the castle as the narrow streets around it limit the views. Inside it is very ornate with decorative vaulted ceilings.



The front of the Salzburg Cathedral is being repaired and scaffolding is in place hiding it from view (as is a large covered fountain and a Christmas market). The lower part of the scaffolding has a life size picture of the Cathedral over the top so people can still see what it looks like.



The dome of the cathedral was destroyed in the war (as was so much of everything), but has been restored to its former glory.



There are 4 identical organs near the altar of the cathedral (above) and a large organ at the rear.

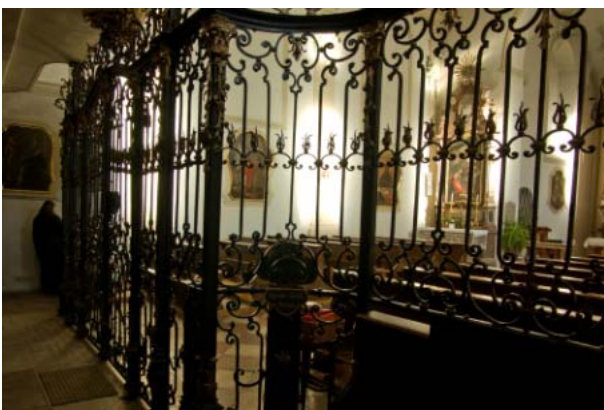
The ceilings are elaborately carved and painted. Each section is different and paintings show the story of the crucifixion of Christ.



St Michaelskirche is sandwiched between two other buildings and currently has a forest of Christmas trees out the front. Access is again restricted to the rear of the church by a metal grill which is opened for services.



The short building to the right is Cafe Demel where we had lunch which included a hot chocolate (which was very similar to the one in Switzerland) and a piece of cake. I had the nougat chocolate cake and Audrey the Sachertorte (as Demel is one of the possible creators).



The Christmas trees were on display and once purchased are covered in a net to make it easy to transport. The tree is netted by passing its trunk first through a funnel (below right) where it is coated like a sausage.



The Kollegienkirche (University church) looked grand on the outside and on the inside looked like someone had stolen the furniture. It is still being restored and while the statues and decorative features of the church are there it is lacking in pews and alters. Donations gratefully accepted.



The last market for the day (I left out the other markets like the ones I've met before) was more a fruit and vegetable market with a few Christmasy things thrown in. The produce looked very good.

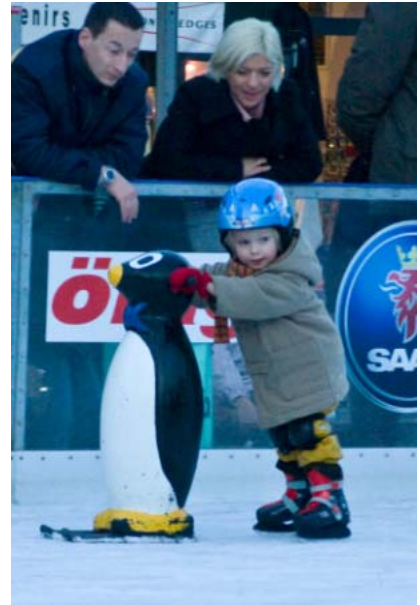




Audrey found a Steiff stall at a Christmas market with a large bear out the front and a small frog inside. The frog was cute, but at €80 for a small toy it stayed behind.

An outdoor ice skating rink looked over by a statue of Mozart (I wonder what he would have thought of the modern rock music being played to the skaters?) had helpers for the children to learn to skate. The penguins are pushed along in front to help steady yourself and give you confidence away from the wall. A polar bear

was being used by a slightly older girl to help with her ice dancing.



The city is full of signs telling you who lived here. In this case it was Mozart's widow and her children and second husband.

The moon rising over Salzburg.



Don't stay at the Ramada hotel in Salzburg.

In the room we set up for the night and did some diarying. The room air-conditioner was making its usual sounds but changing the dial made very little difference to the actual temperature. We opened the window and went to sleep. In the morning we had problems with the temperature in the shower (and the basin). We seemed to have run out of cold water as the cold water was running at about 30 degrees and in the shower which had one of those fancy dial a temperature taps we couldn't make it comfortable at all. Oh and the hotel provided soap dispenser had fallen off the wall. We complained about all this to reception who said they would have maintenance look at it, but the problem with the warm water disappeared. The soap dispenser was never put back on (it's held on with double sided tape and probably requires a couple of days of being dry to stick properly anyway).

After wandering around Salzburg all day we came home tired and Audrey's feet hurt so we thought we would order room service. Nothing very exciting but the schnitzel and chips (or fries as it said on the menu) would do. The room service girl arrived without cutlery and for some reason with schnitzel and rice (which is not a menu dish of either room service or the restaurant). We sent her away with a request for the correct meal and some cutlery. She returned about 30 minutes later with both, but it could only be described as warm by someone who wanted to make the hotel sound good, and there were grains of rice still on the plates.

The water the next morning did work correctly and we packed and headed down to breakfast, which was OK, but nothing special. Then it came time to checkout. We had been quoted €79 and €10 each for breakfast. The restaurant was €5. The amount we were charged was €12 more. We questioned this and were told that breakfast was €13 per person. After informing the girl on the front desk we were quoted €10 per person she said we must have misunderstood. We explained that we had checked the price thoroughly when we arrived and asked to speak to the manager. He wasn't there till 8am when we would already be on a train. After running off a list of the other problems we had encountered since we had arrived she said she would reduce breakfast to €10. She did this for one night only. We gave up paid the bill and got the manager's name and will write a letter and forward it to the head office of Ramada if we can find it and post reviews on the internet on all the sites we can find. For those coming to Austria, the Ramada is close to the station and the beds are comfortable enough, but don't count on anything else.