

Wednesday, October 4th

Baden-Baden

The rain has fallen steadily for the past two days, so it's been another spa day. As evening falls, it has started to let up as we head down the stairs from our hotel toward Leopoldsplatz. We come to a Lowenbrau Biergarten, and notice an Italian restaurant across the street. Deciding to take a break from Schnitzel and other pork dishes, we settle on baked Lasagna and ~~red wine~~ hearty German beer. I've decided that the best way to determine a country's favorite beverage is to see what they sell in six packs. If you can buy a six pack of wine in Italy, their vintners are probably first-rate. If you can't find the same thing in Germany, you'll probably be happier with a six pack (or mini-keg) of Lowenbrau, Augustiner, or Paulaner.

The restaurant atmosphere is quiet and subdued. However, we're soon having a conversation with the friendly Canadian couple seated behind us, and a German dentist in town for a convention to the side of us. The Canadians are rabid NFL fans, so we immediately establish a bond. He is an airline pilot who retired then returned to work out of boredom, while she (an American by birth) is a retired schoolteacher who enjoys traveling. They will return to Baden-Baden again in December. The dentist speaks excellent English, and joins in. One of the most enjoyable things about traveling is how quickly one makes new friends. The barriers that normally separate complete strangers dissolve instantly when people discover they are travelers.

Soon after the dentist takes his leave, another friendly stranger takes his place. Christian Rasselenberg is a tall, white-haired, 40-something entrepreneur who reminds us vaguely of Steve Martin. German by birth, he lives across the border in France to avoid Germany's high personal tax rate and has spent considerable time in the United States. We soon learn what a small world it really is when he says that he once owned a Jenny Craig Weight Loss franchise and had visited the headquarters building in Del Mar. He is now attempting to franchise a new business managing and providing credit information via the Internet to businesses within Germany. He points out that most Germans still manage their finances on a cash and carry basis, and that credit card use is still relatively new. In support of his point, we recall that most businesses in Schliersee still do not accept credit cards. He also comes to Pennsylvania about four times each year to visit his son and estranged wife.

When I ask for the check in German ("die Rechnung, bitte"), Christian takes the opportunity to correct my pronunciation. He suddenly looks at me and says "ichhhhhh", making a guttural sound and saying I need to speak from the back of the throat. When I attempt to imitate him, it's too much for the people three tables away who begin roaring with laughter. "It's a difficult language", he says by way of apology, as we all share a hearty laugh. As we leave the restaurant, Christian walks with us awhile and as we part company we vow to write to each other.

Thursday, October 5th

Rothenberg ob der Tauber

The day dawns warm and partly cloudy, with lots of blue sky showing through. I make one last pilgrimage to the Caracalla Spa, while Karen decides to sleep in and pack leisurely. We bid adieu to Hotel am Markt at 12:30, heading out of town in the direction of the autobahn. Once on the autobahn, we consult the map and appear to have clear sailing along an uncomplicated route. Karen breaks out the last of the bread, salami, and cheese for another mobile mini-feast.

As we cruise along at 85mph, with the map in hand, good weather, and the travel gods smiling upon us, we learn that they also have a sense of humor. Before long we realize we have traveled too far and probably should have taken the last exit, but we saw no clear route markings – only directional signs toward distant cities. We soon encounter a traffic jam due to daytime road construction, and end up driving through Stuttgart far to the southeast. With no signs visible to direct us to a more eastwardly route, we plot a new strategy. As we approach a highway

intersection, we exit the autobahn and successfully navigate a local bypass road that connects us – finally – with the correct autobahn heading north towards Rothenberg. After congratulating ourselves for outsmarting the German road system (better late than never), we pass a more or less continuous line of trucks for about 90 minutes. As we approach the turnoff, we use the cell phone to call ahead to the hotel to advise them that we are en route and not to cancel our room. After seeing signs for Rothenberg for miles, they suddenly stop. Suspicious, we exit the autobahn at a service station. I enter the mini-mart and buy a Twix bar so I can move to the front of the line and ask directions. The cashier doesn't speak English, but her young associate does. I'm told that we passed the turnoff for Rothenberg about 15 Km back. I thank her for the info, then head north until we reach a rare exit that allows us to reverse course. As we approach the turnoff for Rothenberg, we realize that one of the zillion trucks we passed must have blocked our view of the original exit sign.

We see what we believe to be the turrets marking the gateways into [Rothenberg](#) in the distance. As we exit, we see two signs pointing toward Rothenberg - in opposite directions. It appears that the older part of the city is to the west, so we turn right. After consulting our notes one last time, we are rewarded with a view of the Galgentor Gate into the old city. We cross the threshold, nearly three hours later than planned. Following the directions provided by the hotel, we crawl along the ancient cobblestone streets until we come to Market Square. People are everywhere, wandering to and fro across the streets and plaza. We turn right in front of the Rathaus and head down a touristy street filled with Christmas, antique, and pastry shops. Almost by accident, we arrive at the side street where Hotel Kloster-Stuble sits across the narrow street from a 16th century church where services continue to be held each Sunday. Parking is scarce, but we luck out by getting the last spot against the church cloistered wall.



A shopping street in Rothenberg ob der Tauber

[Hotel Kloster-Stuble](#) is elegant, and blend of old and new. Many Americans are staying here. Our room is large and comfy, with two separate rooms and beds, a large bathroom and shower, and all the modern conveniences including a flat screen LCD TV. The one drawback is the low door thresholds. After forgetting to duck and banging my head, Karen hangs a towel over the door as a reminder. There is a free Internet terminal in the hallway outside our room which comes in handy for checking email and looking up information about our destinations.

The pub is warm and friendly, and after our 5-hour drive we are much in need of refreshment. The cold German beer tastes great, perfect for washing down a plate of brats and sauerkraut. We read about Altfrankische Weinstube am Klosterhof in Rick Steves' guidebook. It's described as a dark and smoky candlelit pub in a 600-year-old building. It was our second hotel choice, so we decide we have to check it out. There is a chill in the night air as we take a short but circuitous walk through the quiet streets in search of the pub. A partial moon illuminates the nearby cathedral. We come to a plaza where the street numbers stop where we find the entrance to a museum but no pub. As we wander further up the street, we stumble across the dark entrance to Altfrankische Weinstube am Klosterhof.

We enter a candlelit world of happy, boisterous locals swilling down beer and enjoying each others company. The hostess shows us to a table in back and provides menus. Soon, two English-speaking blond women appear in search of seats, and we offer them the other half of our table. We soon learn that they are a mother and daughter from Vancouver, Canada on a month-long trip through Germany. The daughter, Julia, works in a London office. The mother, Joyce, is a nurse. We enjoy their company immensely, and talk for more than two hours about traveling and cultural differences between North America and Germany. Staying at a hotel in Schwangau, they were



Hotel Kloster-Stuble (foreground, left) in Rothenberg. Our blue Ford is parked on the right.

shocked to find out first-hand that saunas are co-ed naked. We also talked about the German proclivity for orderliness and doing things a certain way, and driving fast on the autobahn. As if to underscore the point about “orderliness”, the hostess drops off a menu but later tells Joyce and Julia that the kitchen is closed – without giving them the opportunity to order! I pay for the drinks, and then we compare itineraries for tomorrow. We all have the Crime Museum near the top of the list, so in parting Joyce says “we’ll probably see you there”.

Friday, October 6th

Rothenberg ob der Tauber and Vienna

We wake to another warm day with scattered clouds. After a buffet breakfast of (what else?) salami, cheese, bread, yogurt, juice, and coffee, we head out to explore the town. Our first destination is the Crime Museum. It’s not quite 10am, and the streets are already bustling with tourists. There is a paddy wagon in front of the Crime Museum and a cage just large enough for a human suspended from a pole. Both provide a chilling glimpse of what’s to come. Appropriately, we begin our tour in the dungeon. There we cringe as we see The Rack and a chair covered with sharp studs and restraining straps. As we pass through three floors of exhibits, a wide variety of tools of torture are on display. Some are so diabolically ingenious in their design that it’s clear some people in the 16th century had way too much time on their hands. There are even dioramas - miniature models of medieval villages - showing many instruments in use at once.

The “10-foot pole” was originally invented to capture a witch. Once a witch was identified, a person who touched one did so at their peril. An noose made of iron was attached to the end of a long pole, allowing the captor to catch a witch without touching her. Once the noose had been placed over the witch’s head, the inward-pointing spikes on the noose made escape impossible. We also learned that the way a criminal was executed was determined by their status and the type of crime. Those who were honorable were beheaded and given a decent burial. Those who were not were hanged and left to rot. Charming.

With only a couple of hours to tour this fascinating museum, we are hard pressed to see everything. On the second floor, we run into Joyce, who talks us into surprising Julia with a pat on the fanny. Julia laughs, but appears a bit peeved that we were able to sneak up on her with Mom’s assistance.

We finish our tour of the museum, and then head up a shopping street. As we linger by a pastry shop, a friendly sales clerk offers samples to passersby. There are large, colored balls that look something like donuts. A young girl stops in the sidewalk to appraise a suit of armor.

We continue up the street and into the market square. People stop and stare at a mini-version of the glockenspiel in Munich’s Marienplatz, as its characters perform an ancient dance in a window of the old Rathaus. We have just enough time for a quick tour of one of the many Christmas shops near our hotel before we



Nightmare version of Barcalounger at Crime Museum

reluctantly say goodbye to our new friends. It's 12:30, and we have allowed ourselves plenty of time to make the two-hour return trip to Munich via the autobahn.

As we head out of Rothenberg and onto the highway, it's time for a short video. Karen shoots video as I play tour guide, narrating what it's like to drive at a pedestrian 90 mph on the autobahn while BMWs, Audis, and Mercedes-Benzes streak by at subsonic speeds. There are no traffic delays and the sun is shining as the green, beautiful countryside rolls past.

We decide to exit the autobahn to fill the tank about 20 km outside of Munich. It is unclear from the map exactly how we get to the car rental return near the Bahnhof. According to Hertz, we should just follow the signs toward "Zentrum" and all will be well. Soon the highway narrows, and eventually funnels into a single lane with traffic lights ahead. We've entered the outskirts of Munich. Again, it's a challenge following the signs and navigating through constantly merging traffic, but soon the street becomes recognizable: a wide boulevard with the opposite lane separated by a wide median. We're on Arnulfstrasse, approaching the Bahnhof.

Checking the time, we have a buffer of at least 45 minutes, long enough for a stopover at [Augustiner Brewery](#). We park on a side street, and walk through the park-like setting to the main restaurant building. Many of the tables and chairs frequented by beer lovers throughout the summer have been folded and stored in the open under huge chestnut trees. The ground is covered with leaves. We enter the now familiar halls of the restaurant, and enjoy our last German meal. Fittingly, it's brats and sauerkraut, bread and schnitzel, chased by half-liter steins of the heavenly Augustiner beer.

We return the car to the Hertz rental garage and are met by the same sulky female employee who checked us out; I think she is Russian. She gives the car a once over, then proceeds to begin cleaning the car windows with the spray bottle that we left in the car. I smile and tell her, "that's our



Archive photo of Augustiner Brewery on Arnulfstrasse, near the Munich Hauptbahnhof.

gift to you,” but she is clueless. We take the elevator to the main street then walk the short distance to the train station. I stand in line to validate the voucher that I printed on our home computer, only to be told it is in fact our ticket. We grab one last beer at a stand-up café, then head for the track where our train for Vienna will soon arrive.

The train arrives a few minutes ahead of schedule. As we board a 2nd class car, we find that it has many of the first class amenities we’ve come to expect, like a table and plenty of overhead storage racks. After stowing our luggage, we settle into window seats for the 4 hour and 30 minute ride. The train departs on schedule at 5:20pm, and we soon pass familiar landmarks on the way out of Munich. A quiet man has taken the seat next to Karen, which we now notice has a “reserved” sign on it. Next time, we will try to find four seats with no reservation tickets on them so we can spread out.

I decide to check out the dining car, while Karen says she will join me after a brief rest stop. As I enter the dining car, people are relaxing at tables a comfortable distance apart. I am lucky to find a single vacant table all the way to the back. A waiter soon arrives to take my order. The menu features Austrian as well as German beer. I order an Austrian beer, then watch as the sun begins to set over the alps while a full moon rises slowly in the east. I imagine I look quite content as Karen arrives and orders a small bottle of champagne.

We strike up a conversation with the woman sitting across from our table. Her name is Suzanne; she is an anesthesiologist who is visiting her boyfriend in Vienna. She says she or he have been making the trip between Munich and Vienna by train twice a month for over four years! Her boyfriend is involved in a Web-based online gaming business and is reluctant to move. We congratulate her on being able to maintain a long-distance relationship for so long. We talk about the fall of the Berlin wall, the reconstruction of East Germany and how it will continue to be an economic burden on the country for many years to come.

As we are talking, the car door slides to and fro with the motion of the train, letting in the train noise and making it difficult to hear. After tiring of trying to hold it shut, I suggest that we return to our regular seats to have a more civilized conversation. Suzanne follows us back to the passenger car, where we continue talking until we arrive at the Westbahnhof in Vienna. The time has passed quickly, and we thank her for the time we’ve had together. She compliments us by saying it is rare to find others with whom you feel *K...*, a German word for “connection”. (see German phrase book). Suzanne’s boyfriend is there to meet her when disembark. We wave goodbye, and head off toward the entrance to the underground.

When we arrive at the U-Bahn station, it is after 10:30 pm and we find that all of the ticket booths are closed. We find a friendly mini-market clerk who explains how to use the automated ticket vending machines. We thank him, then using the touch screen we select “English” and buy two tickets good for 24 hours of transportation anywhere in the city, including U-Bahn and trams. We board the U-Bahn train and two stops later we exit at Stephansplatz. Taking the escalator to the surface, we emerge into a large plaza. St. Stephan’s Cathedral is directly in front of us. Behind us is an outdoor café, where a handful of people are enjoying late-night drinks.

We soon find Neuer Street where our hotel is located a few steps from the plaza. The heavy door swings open just as we arrive, as an elderly couple passes through. We walk down a long hallway to the ancient elevator, which takes us to the 3rd floor. As we exit, the hotel entrance is to the left. As we approach, the large red doors swing open automatically, revealing a small lobby and a hallway lined with aging carpet. At the front desk we are greeted by Michael, the receptionist. He walks us through the ornate dining room, where dining tables are set with white tablecloths and silverware for breakfast. Michael shows us to our room, which is clean and “cozy” – there is barely enough room for us and the luggage. There is a large armoire, a double-bed with nightstands, and two chairs and a table at the foot of the bed. There is a small bathroom with shower, and the communal toilet is

located down the hall. Based on the room rates, we saved over 20€ per night by not having a private toilet. When in Wien, do as the Wieners do!

After finding creative ways to store the luggage, we head out into the late evening in search of nourishment. Not far from the plaza, we find the glowing golden arches beckoning to us. We finally succumb and order cheeseburgers and fries. While they don't quite measure up to our expectations, we are grateful to find hot food when most other restaurants are closed late on a Friday night.

Saturday, October 7th Vienna

After a long day of travel, we sleep in until 8:00. The dining room is surprisingly full, and we find that smoking is still permitted in dining areas here. By the time we get organized and hit the streets, the Saturday crowds are out in force. Karen spots a hurdy gurdy man playing tunes in the plaza near St. Stephans Cathedral. We walk down Kärntnerstrasse, the main shopping street, towards the Opera House. We stop by the tourist bureau to pick up a detailed map and an inexpensive guidebook, *Vienna from A to Z*, for 3 €. Our timing is perfect, as we get to the counter just ahead of a crush of tourists. We escape across the street to an authentic Viennese café and relax with a cappuccino while we digest the guidebook. We remember that Suzanne told us the night before about a Museum Night where all of Vienna's museums are open late and are accessible for a single fee. We also decide to follow Rick Steves' suggestion to do a tram tour that takes us around the ring road circling old Vienna.



Stephansplatz in old Vienna is known for its cafes and world-class shopping. Just remember to plan your shopping days to avoid Sunday, when most stores are closed due to labor union rules.

The tram is a leisurely and inexpensive way to become familiar with the layout of old Vienna. The tram runs in a big circle around the old city. Using Rick Steves' guide, we board the tram in front of the Opera House and take the east-bound tram toward the city park. The guidebook provides narration, pointing out landmarks with colorful commentary. The entire tour takes about 40 minutes.

After completing the circuit, we decide to ride the tram back to the city park and hop off. It's a beautiful, warm, sunny day, perfect for a stroll. The lawns are dotted with sunbathers. We follow a meandering trail past a large pond, where we see woman tossing bird feed to legions of pigeons and ducks. We eventually come to a bronze statue of Johann Strauss, near a large building which offers concerts in the early evening. We patiently wait our turn among the many tourists to strike a pose with the statue, shining brilliantly in the sunlight.

We take the tram to a subway stop which connects to [Prater Park](#), home of the world-famous red Ferris wheel (Riesenrad) and a symbol of Vienna since 1897. We follow the crowds along the frontage road leading to the park. Once inside, we queue up for the Riesenrad ride which costs 7€ each. Unlike traditional Ferris wheels, this one features large gondolas as big as railroad passenger cars. Most are designed to hold up to 20 passengers, but some are outfitted for restaurant style dining. At the apex of the Ferris wheel, 200 feet above old Vienna, the view is spectacular.

Back on the ground, we ask directions to the Schweizerhaus, one of Prater's many fine restaurants offering good food and great beer. As we stroll through the park, we come to a go-cart track where young drivers race madly around a tight course. Their intense expressions lend drama and amusement to the event. I experience a pang of nostalgia as I remember racing around this same track during my first visit to Europe at the age of 20.

We find the Schweizerhaus restaurant in a traditional Biergarten setting, with a sea of tables nestled under a canopy of chestnut trees. Most tables are occupied, a good sign that we made the best choice. While waiting for our steins of beer arrive, I walk to the nearby carousel to snap a few pictures of the live ponies in harness. It is then that I realize that Prater Park is a wonderful throwback to simpler times, before our overly litigious society put a damper on fun. When our food arrives, the portions are huge. The diners at the next table comment on the size of Karen's portion of pig's knuckle, saying something to the effect of "it looks like you have your work cut out for you!". Karen replies that the waiter had informed her that it was a single portion, without mentioning that it was suitable for a family of four.

Back at the hotel, we dress warmly before venturing into the night. We decide to walk to the Hofburg Palace, where hundreds are gathered to purchase tickets to Museum Night. Along the way, we pay our respects to a statue of Mozart. The Palace is located in the heart of Vienna, where most of its many museums are clustered within a 10 minute walk of each other. On this special evening, a single 12€ ticket allows entrance to all museums between 7pm and 2am. Our biggest challenge is to choose which museums to visit, although we are confident that any choice will be a good one.

We start at the [Academy of Fine Arts](#), with its small but exciting collection of works from Bosch, Botticelli, and Rubens, among others. The museum is located on the fourth floor of the academy, which is unremarkable in appearance. The stark interior and poster covered walls give every indication that students have the run of the house. In honor of the special occasion, small candles light the way up several flights of stairs and down a long hallway to the museum entrance.

In the first room, a small crowd has gathered three deep in front of The Last Judgment by one of my favorite artists, Hieronymus Bosch. One could gaze on this busy painting for hours and still miss its subtle details. Posters sold in the museum bookstore spotlight the many instances of souls suffering eternal damnation at the hands of hellish creatures. It's hard to imagine this painting not being a favorite recruiting poster of the church in the 1500's.

Works by Rubens appear so lifelike that they look more like photographs than paintings. We spend a leisurely two hours drifting slowly through this engrossing collection, then make our way back out to the street. The evening air is cool and fresh after a brief rainstorm, as we head towards the [Leopold Museum](#) three blocks away.

We find a large crowd gathered outside the entrance. As people leave, the guards carefully control the number of patrons who are allowed to enter. People jockey for position while trying to remain civil, and we are crushed by bodies as we approach the turnstile and finally pop out the other side. Now on the inside looking out, we head for the first room where we are introduced to works of [Egon Schiele](#). In addition to Schiele's many strange and wonderful paintings, an explanation in German and English accompanies each one. We learn how the artist conceived each work, and what inspired him to paint it. The desired effect – and result – is a feeling of connection and understanding between patron and artist that could not have been achieved otherwise.

[Gustav Klimt](#) is the second featured artist on the ground floor. Like Schiele, he bucked the art establishment in the early 1900's but produced works that were controversial, if not scandalous. His largest painting "Medicine", that of a patron's wife named Adele with whom he is rumored to have had an affair, is actually a reproduction. Sadly, some of the greatest works in Vienna were destroyed during World War II. Happily, many survived.

Sunday, October 8th

Vienna

We awake early on our last full day in Europe. At breakfast we say hello to a couple from Minnesota who are in Vienna for work and pleasure. He laments that he has spent more time in conference rooms than in the city streets.

We take the U-Bahn to the street corner nearest the Natural History Museum. It is sunny but much cooler than yesterday, feeling more like autumn than summer. The Natural History Museum is housed within a former palace. Outside the restrooms sits a hut made from mammoth bones and hides, reminding us how we've evolved and how cozy our lives have become. We spend a fascinating two hours surveying its vast exhibits of animals, insects, birds, and prehistoric life.

After taking a coffee break in the museum café, we walk the short distance back to the [U-Bahn](#). We take separate trains; Karen heads for the shopping district, and I head south on the U1 line in the direction of the [Amalienbad Pools](#) and [Oberlaa Spa](#). When I arrive at Reumannplatz, the last station, I walk up the stairs and into the sunlight. Across the tracks is the Amalienbad building, housing one of the largest indoor swimming pools in Austria. I hop the next tram for the 20 minute ride south to Oberlaa Spa.

The Oberlaa Spa complex is a huge labyrinth of locker rooms, pools, saunas, and sunbathing areas. I check in at the front desk, and obtain a private changing cabin which is also used for storage. An electronic key controls access. When I arrive at the sauna, I find there are five separate rooms of various size, each set to a different temperature. The green and red lights above each door indicate whether it is okay to enter (green) or whether a sauna is in progress (red – don't enter). When the last person enters, it is time for the sauna to begin. One of the more experienced guests volunteers to lead the group. First, the leader asks if anyone has a vial of eucalyptus scent. When it is offered, the leader pours some into a bucket of water, which is then poured onto the hot rocks, generating steam that raises the temperature several degrees from "hot" to "hotter". When the temperature becomes almost unbearable, the leader begins twirling a towel overhead, while snapping it methodically to distribute the steam and bring some relief. About this time, everyone "oooo's" and "ahhhhhhs". If the leader does a good job, the group typically requests a second round. After 10 to 15 minutes, the ritual is over and everyone applauds. Everyone then makes a made dash for one of the pools or showers to cool down. I also learned early on that it is considered bad form to leave the room before the sauna is finished.

I return to the hotel shortly before 5pm to find the room empty. Karen soon returns following a day of window shopping and relaxing in the room. We locate a restaurant called Ferdinandt Zwickl-Beisl in the guidebook located off Karntnerstrasse, the main shopping street. When we arrive, we find the menu somewhat limited and decide to dine at the establishment next door. We enjoy our last dinner of Weinersnitzel and hearty Austrian beer, then head back to the room to turn in early. Our wake up call will arrive much too soon at 4am.

Monday, October 9th

Fly Home

We awaken before the alarm, then shower and pack within less than 45 minutes. The kind night manager Johann offers to make us coffee, which we gratefully accept. He asks in excellent English if we like our Austrian-born governor, to which we reply "We love Arnold, even though we poke fun at him sometimes. Not only has he been an effective governor, he keeps everyone loose with his great sense of humor." The taxi driver arrives about 5 minutes late, and helps us with our bags. Although it's still dark and cold outside, the interior of the Mercedes SL430 taxi is nice and warm.

The taxi driver is a native born Viennese who also speaks excellent English. His conversation is upbeat and very lively, considering the early hour. He explains how labor union rules dictate that shops be closed on Sunday, and how the porous border with Austria's eastern European neighbors has caused immigration problems. He drops us at the airport, where we check in and wait for the shuttle to take us to the plane. Once on board, we relax for the short flight to Zurich.

We are told that fog has (again) delayed our landing in Zurich. The pilot explains in three different languages that we will be making an instrument landing, where the plane basically lands itself. As we drop through the clouds, the ground rushes up to meet us quite suddenly as we make an uneventful landing. When we arrive at the American Airlines counter, we are rushed through passport check and baggage check, then board our Boeing 767 for the 8 hour flight to New York's JFK Airport.

We sleep little on the flight from Zurich to JFK. With a looming 3 ½ hour layover, our investment in the Admirals Club guest pass seems like a good one. After a long trek through the airport concourse, we finally arrive at the Admirals Club. After check in, we relax in the lounge area with a burger and a beer. I immediately check the NFL scores from Sunday on a computer workstation to find that our Chargers have beaten the dreaded Steelers. Turning on my cell phone for the first time in over two weeks, I find several messages from friends who expected to see us at the game and wondered why we weren't calling back (!)

We board the plane at 5pm local time for the 5 ½ hour flight to San Diego. Lucky for us, it's nearly midnight our time, so it should be easy to fall asleep. I wake up just before touchdown, and we are delighted to find that all of our bags arrived intact. The Express Shuttle driver takes his time leaving the airport, but makes up the time by doing 80 mph up I-15. We arrive on our doorstep just after 9pm, over 25 hours since we woke up on the far side of the world that morning. Our kitty Celeste has trouble recognizing us at first, and then realizes who we are. No matter how great the adventure, it's always good to come home!

The End