

Amsterdam, Malta and Sicily

April 3-22, 2014

Thursday-Friday, April 3-4 - We drove to PWM (Portland Jetport) and checked the car into the new Park'N Jet lot near the airport. They drove us to the terminal in their shuttle and we checked in for our United flight. We were able to use the TSA Pre✓ since we joined Global Entry (more on that later). It was great! After having lunch at Shipyard we bought some books to read on the flight over. I got Malcom Blackwell's "the Outliers" (which turned out to be a great read). Finally, we flew to Newark where we caught our flight to Amsterdam.

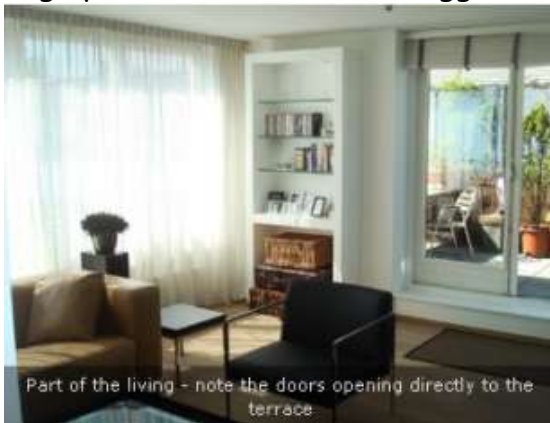
When we arrived, our plan was to take the train from the airport to Centraal Station.

We finally figured out how to get tickets, found the platform, and waited for the next train. After it arrived, we realized that there were two



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levels in second class and the lower level was packed. We went to the second level only to discover that it was packed. Also, since Cindy couldn't carry her bag up the narrow stairs, I lugged them both. We settled in as best we could



Part of the living - note the doors opening directly to the terrace

and I began trying to contact Nat (our landlord's partner) by phone to let him know we had arrived and were on our way to the apartment. I was finally able to send him a text message and he replied that he would meet us there.

When we arrived at Centraal Station, we decided to take a cab to the apartment. We were pleasantly

surprised to find that it was everything we had expected. We walked to a

nearby market to get provisions for our stay. Then, after walking back to the apartment, I went in search of [Greenhouse Namaste](#), a nearby coffeeshop that I had researched, to buy some pot. I was able to find it (right where the map had shown it would be) and I bought two grams for thirty euros. I immediately went back and rolled a small joint. It had been a long time since I smoked pot and I got a strong buzz right away. I love Amsterdam! We walked to [Café Tisfris](#) for lunch. It's on the [Zwanenburgwal](#) canal so the atmosphere was nice. By this time it was still pretty early and we wanted to stay awake as long as possible so we unpacked and acquainted ourselves with the apartment, then took a walk around the neighborhood. We were able to kill enough time so that we could have an early dinner of tapas at [Olijfje](#), a local restaurant about a block from the apartment. The waitress there gave us a great tip about [Kukenhof Gardens](#) (more on that later). Anyway, after dinner, we were able to stay awake until about 20:30 when we finally went to sleep.

Saturday, April 5 - We walked to the Waterlooplein metro station, bought a day pass, took the train to [Nieuwmarkt](#) (where we checked out the open air market) and had a galette from a little stand in the market. The guy at the stand spoke to me in Dutch and, when I told him I was American, said to me in perfect English that he thought I was Dutch, too.



We got back on the train to Centraal Station and walked to the nearby Canal pier where we boarded the canal boat for a [cruise](#). We were surrounded by Russian tourists and they spoke no other language but Russian. But they seemed to really enjoy the experience.

After the cruise, we began walking back toward Nieuwmarkt. We ended up walking past the [Old Church](#) and into the [Red Light District](#). The crowds of rowdy tourists were annoying so we detoured into a different neighborhood where we got a bit lost. Ultimately, we were able to make our way back to Nieuwmarkt where we caught a metro train back to the apartment. After a couple of drinks and another few hits of pot, we decided to have dinner at a

nearby restaurant called Woo Bros. The food was Asian inspired and very good. We were still a bit jet-lagged, so we went back to the apartment and went to bed early.

Sunday, April 6 - We began this rainy morning walking to [Oriental City](#) for brunch. After a short wait, we were seated on the second floor overlooking the [Oudezijds Voorburgwal](#) canal where we enjoyed a fantastic dim sum feast. Judging from the line of people waiting for tables as we left, this is a popular restaurant. Despite the pain was experiencing (I apparently pulled a muscle in my back as a result of lugging our bags up to the second level of the train on Friday) we walked back to the [Het Scheepvaart](#) maritime museum. We were fortunate that admission was free on Sunday but there was also a large crowd and we weren't able to wait for the tour of the East Indiaman ship [Amsterdam](#). Anyway, I was in discomfort now from the pain and all the walking so we went back to the apartment for a rest. I was actually able to see an episode of Jaime Oliver's *15 Minute Meals* on television.



Since we had such a large brunch, we weren't very hungry at dinnertime. So we went to the local market (Albert Heijn) and bought some green olive tapenade, hummus, mortadella, and prosciutto. Then, as we were looking for some bread to have with our snacks, they brought out a freshly baked batch of focaccia. It was an excellent repast and we even had leftovers for a future lunch.

Monday, April 7 - Amsterdam is renowned for its Indonesian rijsttafel (rice table) restaurants. We enjoyed rice table meals from a restaurant that we patronized in San Rafael when we lived there. So we wanted to have one here; however, the menus at the ones we saw (such as [Indrapura](#)) appeared to be too much food. We did find a smaller version served at [Kantjil en de Tijger](#) (now closed) which we had for lunch. It was the perfect size and much

less expensive. Afterwards, we tried walking around some but my back was hurting so we decided to go back to the apartment, do some laundry, and rest. We also arranged to meet Martjin (our landlord) who had recently



returned from Japan. He was very friendly and helpful. We informed him that we were really enjoying the apartment.

Later, we were ready for dinner but there were few nearby restaurants that were open on Monday. We did find an Italian restaurant ([A Tavola](#))

that was open so we began walking there in a heavy rain. Fortunately, the apartment had a huge umbrella that we used. But we still got soaked because the wind was blowing the rain. As we approached A Tavola, we saw a smaller place and decided to duck in there. So we just had a pizza and went back to the apartment.

Tuesday, April 8 - We walked to the Waterlooplein metro station again where we bought two more day passes. That allowed us to take the metro and then a tram to the [Rijksmuseum](#) (pictured at right).

It was fabulous! We loved the Dutch artists and the dollhouses. We had lunch at the café in the museum and walked around for several hours. Afterward, we took the tram/metro back to the apartment where we relaxed and



had some drinks, then walked to [éénvístwéévis](#), a great seafood restaurant. It was the best meal we had in Amsterdam.

Wednesday, April 9 - Since I was still in pain, we decided to take the canal bus which has routes on most of the canals in Amsterdam. That way we could see more of the city without having to walk so much, although we did walk around some. At lunchtime we got off the boat and had lunch at a little place called [De Prins](#). We sat outside by the canal, had some great little cheese sandwiches, and watched the world go by. After lunch, we caught the next boat and continued our tour. We had planned to go to the Van Gogh museum but I wasn't really up to that much walking so we went back to the apartment.



We decided to go to an Afrikaans restaurant we had seen near éénvístwéévis named [Kilimanjaro](#). Their specialty was an Ethiopian flatbread called injera. It's used to pick up several spicy meat and vegetable dishes served on top to be eaten with the fingers. It was a great dish and very unusual.

Thursday, April 10 - We did some laundry and prepared for the trip to Malta. For lunch, we finished the leftovers from our Sunday dinner.



but I couldn't walk any further, so we started walking back. We made a wrong turn and had to walk a long way to get back to Plantage

Then we decided to walk to [Wertheim Park](#) on the other side of the [Nieuwe Herengracht](#) canal toward the [Natura Artis Magistra](#) zoo. We walked to the [Singelgracht](#) canal and [Oosterpark](#)



Middenlaan, which was the street back to the apartment. Fortunately, there were several benches along the way so I could stop and rest.

When we returned to the apartment, I planned for a car to take us to the airport tomorrow. Cindy wanted to go back to Woo Bros for dinner so we did.

Friday, April 11 - We finished packing and went down to Valkenbergerstraat to meet the car as we had arranged. We arrived at the airport and checked in for our flight. Next stop...Malta.

We arrived early and waited for Tom (Cindy's brother). He had been in a meeting so he wasn't able to be there when we arrived. Meanwhile, I went to the Sixt booth to get our rental car. Tom finally arrived and took me to the lot where I picked up the rental. Then I followed him to his new place in [Swieqi](#). Our nephew Alexander was there when we arrived and he and Tom showed us around the house. Tom also told me about the pharmacy down the street where I could see a doctor in the morning about the pulled muscle in my back.

For dinner, Tom took us to a local Italian restaurant called Fumo (now closed) where we had a terrific seafood appetizer and great hand-made pasta dishes.

Saturday, April 12 - Right after breakfast, I walked to the pharmacy Tom had told me about. I asked if the doctor would be in today and was told that he would be in shortly. So I waited in a section of the pharmacy with a few chairs for patients-in-waiting where I met a nice octogenarian woman who was waiting for her daughter to pick her up. The doctor arrived but it was not the older male doctor they were expecting. She was a young woman who was substituting for the other guy. Anyway, I told her the story about how I had ostensibly pulled the muscle in my back. She prescribed a strong painkiller and a muscle relaxer which I had filled at the pharmacy. When I paid for the prescription, they also included the doctor's fee of twelve euros (about sixteen dollars). I went back to the house and immediately took the pills.

Genevieve and Olivia arrived around noon. We gave them their birthday presents of new iPhones and they were thrilled. Then we had lunch of chicken soup made by Tom and, afterward, read the girl's report cards and the comments from their respective teachers. It was hilarious.

Cindy and I drove the girls to the shopping mall where Cindy took them shopping while I relaxed in a comfortable chair and waited.

For dinner, Tom took us to a restaurant named Hush (now closed). It had a beautiful view of the marina in St. Julians and we ate al fresco on their terrace.

Sunday, April 13 - I woke up feeling like a new person since taking the medication prescribed for me yesterday. We walked to a Japanese restaurant named [Okura](#) for a sushi lunch. Spent the rest of the day visiting with the kids (Tom had to return the girls to [Mellieħa](#) that afternoon), had steak salad for dinner, and prepared for our trip to Sicily.

Monday, April 14 - We got up very early to catch the ferry to Sicily (it left at 06:30). We loaded Tom's car and made our way to the first-class lounge.

It was quite cold, especially for Malta, and we weren't able to spend a lot of time on deck but I did manage to take some pictures. Most of them were blurry due to my shivering in the cold and the shuddering of the ferry. Anyway, the trip took about an hour and a half so we arrived in [Pozzallo](#) around 08:00. We decided to drive to



[Syracusa](#), have lunch, and drive back to check into our hotel. When we got to Syracuse, there was a traffic jam and it took us about an hour to get into town. When we got there, we had to drive almost all the around the old town



(which is basically an island) before we were able to find a place to park. We walked through town past the Duomo and stopped at a little bar overlooking the Mediterranean to have a drink and find a place for lunch. We decided to go to [Regina Lucia](#), which was on the square by the Duomo.

After a great lunch, we drove back to Pozzallo and Silva Suri, our hotel.

When we arrived, our hosts welcomed us and took us to our rooms. They were incredible! Both had queen-sized beds and a loft with two twin beds, much more than we needed. We settled in, had some drinks, and made our way to the restaurant, which is ranked #2 by Trip Advisor. We



could see why after our dinner there. It was fantastic but way too much food. We couldn't eat all of it. We soon learned that this was common in Sicily.

Tuesday, April 15 - I got up in time to eat breakfast in the restaurant, especially since it was included. They had a fairly standard buffet: breads, meats, cheeses, hard-boiled eggs, cereals, juice, coffee, tea, etc. However, after I had finished my breakfast and was waiting for Tom to finish his, our hostess told us that a local farmer had just delivered freshly made ricotta and that we should try it. WOW! This was one of the best things I've ever eaten. So I had to take some back to the room for Cindy. I asked if I could take a tray to the room and they started piling it with all kinds of food. I explained that Cindy wouldn't possibly want that much food, I ended up taking some coffee, meat, cheese, fruit, and that wonderful ricotta. After breakfast, we headed west for our destination of the day... [Agrigento](#), famous for its Greek and Roman ruins. After a long trip, made slower by the two-lane roads, we pulled off to a dirt side road in search of Valle Lupo, an agriturismo and restaurant that Tom had read about. Although it seemed that we were lost and going nowhere, we eventually found it in a large, hilly field. We went in and were seated on a terrace overlooking the field and our hostess set the table with a tablecloth, plates, glasses, and flatware. We ordered a carafe of the house wine and, shortly, the food started arriving. First was a plate of cheeses and sausages, followed by perfectly cooked vegetables, and, finally, freshly made arancini (rice ball stuffed with cheese). At this point we were pretty well filled but there was much more to come. Hand-made pasta with meat sauce followed, then grilled pork ribs accompanied by more vegetables. We couldn't even come close to finishing it

and left a lot. Even so, they brought cake for dessert. For this huge meal and several carafes of wine for the three of us, they only charged eighty euros (about forty dollars each). It was amazing!

Anyway, it was starting to get late and we had a few miles to go to Agrigento. We finally made it to the ruins and it was crowded with tourists. Tom parked the car in a space that was supposed to be limited to fifteen minutes, which we knew was not going to be



enough time. We began walking up the hill toward the ruins. I was concerned about the car, so Cindy and I only walked to the first temple but Tom walked all the way to the second (he's a fast walker). Anyway, we made it back before the car was ticketed and started back to the hotel. The trip took a long time and we arrived well after dark.

Wednesday, April 16 - Before we leave for Malta, we planned to go into [Ragusa](#) for lunch at [The Duomo](#), a highly rated restaurant near the duomo (right). We arrived in the old town, parked at the bottom of a cliff, and started walking up. We finally arrived and found the duomo but it was too early for lunch. So we had a beer at a little place on the square by the duomo and waited for the restaurant to open. When we arrived there, we were seated in a room that we shared with a party of about ten people. Lunch was a prix fixe affair and was incredibly good but not the best we've had in Sicily. After lunch, we walked around old town Ragusa for a while trying to find where we parked. We finally found it and proceeded back to



Pozzallo to catch the ferry back to Malta. When we got there, we had a few hours to kill so we parked the car and started walking. We decided to stop for a drink at this little café where we sat outside. While there, we noticed that there was a guy walking around looking for cars that were parked illegally. We hadn't noticed the signs notifying (in Italian) that parking was prohibited at that time. Tom rushed back to where we parked to find that he had a ticket. Since we were on our way back to Malta, it wasn't a big problem. Anyway, we finally caught the ferry and made it back.

Thursday, April 17 - Tom and I went to the office where we registered the car in Tom's name (it had been registered in my name). We had agreed that he would buy it back from us. To celebrate, we had it washed. Then, Tom took me back to the house and went to have lunch with a business associate. When he returned, he, Alexander, Cindy, and I took a long walk. We saw some interesting sights but, unfortunately, I hadn't brought my camera. That night, we went to China House (now closed) for dinner.

Friday, April 18 - Tom brought Genevieve and Olivia to visit it with us until Sunday. He made shrimp kabobs that he grilled on the portable grill he bought in Sicily. We had bought a trunkful of things from a discount market in Marina de Ragusa (near Silva Suri). The kids were invested in their iPhones and watching the Disney channel so Tom introduced Cindy and me to Graham Norton on You Tube. We watched the episode with Matt Damon, Hugh Bonneville, and Bill Murray. It was hilarious! Later, we all went to Margot's (now closed) for pizza.

Saturday, April 19 - Tom and Alexander went for another long walk. I decided to go for a drive with Cindy, Genevieve, and Olivia since we had hardly used the rental car. I decided to drive to the airport so I would know how to get there on Monday. When we returned, I backed into the sloping driveway at Tom's house and, to make a long story short, ended up rolling into the garage door, damaging the (brand new)



rental car. I was later able to file a claim with Visa to reimburse me for the damage.

Sunday, April 20 - Today is Easter Sunday. We said our goodbyes to Genevieve and Olivia. Angelique came by to pick them up on the way to Aaron and Mandy's house for an Easter lunch. Tom, Cindy, and I went to Chapter One (now closed) for a prix fixe lunch. Tom and I had a starter of risotto Milanese. Cindy started with a salad with fresh buffalo mozzarella. Tom and Cindy had lamb (cooked sous vide then roasted) and I had roasted sea bass. For dessert, Tom and I had a house made brownie and vanilla ice cream. Cindy had lemon sorbet. It was the best meal we've had in Malta.

Monday, April 21 - We said goodbye to Tom and left for our early morning flight to Amsterdam. When we arrived, we walked to the hotel and checked in. Since we had arrived so early, we had a lot of time so we decided to go to the Keukenhof Gardens. Here are some pictures:



It was a beautiful place. These pictures are a small sampling of what we saw during our visit. We walked for hours and still didn't see all of it.

We took the bus back to the hotel near the airport. Since there weren't any nearby restaurants, we decided to have dinner at the hotel. We couldn't have done better. The service and food were excellent. We had an asparagus bisque (which was a special dedicated to the fresh asparagus that was in season). Then they let us split a rijsttafel dish. They served half of it to each of use separately which made it the perfect amount of food and it was all delicious.

Tuesday, April 22 - Our flight back to Newark was supposed to leave at 09:15 but it was delayed until 14:45. United informed us that we should check in at the normal time. So we checked out of the hotel at 07:00 and walked to the airport. We checked in and went to the lounge. It actually turned out very well because the food and beverage service at the lounge in Amsterdam was much better than what was being offered in Newark.

Anyway, when we finally arrived in Newark, we were able to get through customs very easily because of our Global Entry status. It also afforded us the TSA Pre✓ access when we checked in for our flight to Portland.

However, we did have one more glitch to endure. When we went through customs, Cindy dropped her passport at the customs gate in Terminal B. She didn't discover it until we got to the TSA security check in Terminal A when they asked for picture ID. She was able to use her Maine driver's license to get through security and we went on to the lounge. Then I had to go back to Terminal B. Fortunately, I encountered two Customs agents and asked them where I could go to see if anyone had found Cindy's passport. They gave me directions to an office near the Customs gate. I went there and told the agent about the passport. He asked me the name on the passport and, as I was spelling Cindy's last name (Wight) he handed it over to me. Whew! Cindy and I were both very relieved. After that, everything went smoothly. We arrived in Portland and called Park'N Jet. They sent the shuttle almost immediately and we got the car and drove home.