

# AussieEuropeanTour

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## **Background Information**

### **Why have we written this document?**

This document was started to record the details of our trips around Europe by Motorhome.

It was intended to be for our records and so our family and friends could keep track of what we were up to.

However, as we had gained tremendous help from other traveller's documents during our planning phase we decided to make it available for all to see so that others may gain a little information from us which could assist in their planning.

Some other travellers record all their expenditures and dissect them so they know how much they have spent on diesel, oil, overnight accommodation, ferries, parking, food and beverages, tourism entrance fees etc and provide them in a nice pie chart,

They may even know how many times they have changed gears and some record how many sunny days, cloudy days and rainy days they have experienced – well that is not for us.

We are just in Europe to have a good time, visit as many countries as we can, meet as many nice people as we can and enjoy as much nice food, wine and beer as we can.

To record all that sort of information above would certainly be very time consuming and would detract from the enjoyment of the tour.

We are also slowly adding information to our website from previous tours through Europe, North America, South America and South East Asia.

One of the aims of the European Union, we believe, is to work towards a unified Europe, which is probably a great aim to have.

We first toured Europe in 1978 and the situation was certainly different then to what it is now.

Many things have changed considerably, and some haven't changed much at all.

In 1978 nearly every country had its own currency and language.

There are still at least 13 different currencies and 30 languages – progress but still a long way to go.

Most countries are now moving towards implementing English, the international language, as a second language.

The exception is France where the first language is French and that is the only language they want to speak or accept.

Rules regarding your motorhome length and weight, road tolls, vignettes, electronic boxes, parking, camping, wild camping, speed limits, licences, registration, insurance and overnighing differ from region to region.



Throw in passports, visas and Schengen rules and one might wonder why one would ever set off in a motorhome in Europe in the first place.

The following is a summary of languages, currencies and camping regulations in Europe as at 2018.

Country	Currency	Language	Wild Camping
Austria	Euro	German, Croatian, Hungarian	O/night parking
Belgium	Euro	Dutch/Flemish, French & German	Forbidden
Bulgaria	Lev	Cyrillic, Bulgarian, Turkish	Prohibited but normally accepted
Czech Republic	Koruna	Czech	Not allowed
Croatia	Kuna	Croatian	Forbidden
Denmark	Danish Krone	Danish, German	O/night parking – no camping
Estonia	Euro	Estonian, Russian, Ukrainian, Finnish	Tolerated but ask permission
Finland	Euro	Finnish, Swedish, Russian	Yes in Nat Parks & with permission on private land
France	Euro	French, French & only French	Yes in inland France
Germany	Euro	German	No camping
Greece	Euro	Greek, Turkish	Not officially allowed but it is
Hungary	Forint	Hungarian, German, Romanian	Free o/night not allowed
Italy	Euro	Italian	With permission of Council
Latvia	Euro	Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian	Ask permission from land owner
Lithuania	Euro	Lithuanian, Polish, Russian	Not sure
Luxembourg	Euro	French, German, Luxembourgish	O/night parking or camping - no
Netherlands	Euro	Dutch, Frisian, English	Forbidden
Norway	Norwegian Krone	Norwegian, Finnish	OK – more than 150 metres from nearest house
Poland	Zloty	Polish	Only on private property with owner's permission
Portugal	Euro	Portuguese	Max 48 hours but not in urban areas
Romania	Leu	Romanian, Hungarian, German	Ok with permission from land owner or Council
Slovakia	Euro	Slovak, Hungarian	Not allowed

Slovenia	Euro	Slovenian	OK but not in Nat Park Triglav
Spain	Euro	Spanish, Catalan, Galician	OK with permission from Council, Med Coast - no
Sweden	Swedish Krona	Swedish, Finnish	Yes but not in private gardens or agricultural land
Switzerland	Swiss Franc	German, French, Italian, Romansh	O/night parking max 15 hrs

### **Who are we?**

We are a retired Aussie couple, Rob and Krys Henshaw from Tweed Heads on the border between New South Wales and Queensland, Australia.

Our 2017-2018 tour of Europe is the first tour we have done in a motorhome that we owned.

Our previous tours have been by hire car and hotels, hire car and B&Bs, car and caravan, hired motorhome and small group adventure tours.

We have been keen travellers for quite a while – areas we have travelled in are as follows:-

Argentina	Australia	Austria
Belgium	Brazil	Bulgaria
Canada	Chile	China
Croatia	Czech Republic	Denmark
England	Estonia	Fiji
Finland	France	Germany
Greece	Holland	Hungary
Italy	Latvia	Lithuania
Luxembourg	Malaysia	Mexico
New Zealand	Norway	Peru
Poland	Portugal	Romania
Serbia	Singapore	Slovenia
Slovakia	Spain	Sweden
Switzerland	USA	Wales

### **Our Motorhome Research**

Initially we considered renting homes in regional areas for 1-3 months each as a base and having rental cars to tour the local areas but it seemed difficult to organise.

We then considered motorhomes but from our early enquiries it appeared as though it would cost around \$1,000/week to hire a suitable motorhome and even then it

would be difficult to get a layout which included all the items that we thought we required.

So for a tour of up to 2 years we thought hiring costs of upwards of \$100,000 a little over the top so decided to investigate other alternatives.

We looked at “Buy and Buy-back” arrangements but they seemed to be based around “old clunkers” and the buy-back percentages were fairly dismal.

Outright purchase was our next option and as we thought we would probably spend around 80% of our time in Europe with the remaining 20% in the UK and so started searching for motorhomes in Europe.

We immediately realised the huge challenge of trying to negotiate the purchase of a motorhome in a foreign country and trying to communicate with a motorhome salesman in a foreign language.

Even though we both speak some German when it comes to talking about technical motoring terms that is way out of our league .

Purchasing is one thing but registering and insuring a motorhome as a non-European appeared to be extremely difficult.

So we thought the safest bet would be to look in the UK and began looking in earnest around March-April 2016.

#### **What we thought we wanted based on our caravan experience in Australia**

2 berth only – not a cab over but with a fixed rear double bed

Diesel engine, turbo, auto

Separate shower and toilet

110 litre + fridge freezer

Solar panels and MPPT type solar regulator and a separate leisure battery

Cabin air conditioning

Living area heating

Decent sized fresh water and grey water storage

Not long after commencing our search which consisted of surfing websites such as Ebay, AutoTrader etc we stumbled on to a Facebook page – UKmotorhomefinder <https://www.facebook.com/msteersy/> which is owned by Michael Steers from Stafford, about 4 hours by car NW of London.

We began communicating by email and Skype and Michael’s service turned out to be the best thing that could possibly happen for us.

Michael told us about the different classes, brands and layouts of motorhomes and recommended that we should only consider models that would be relatively easy to sell when we get to that step in 2 years time.

We decided on “A class” motorhomes and then narrowed the choice down to the Hymer brand, based on their reputation and good resale values – then came the hard part of choosing the Hymer model.

Nothing over 7 metres in length to aid parking and also to minimise the costs of ferry crossings – the choice was then narrowed to either the Hymer 544, 584 or 524 models.

Michael conducted site inspections for us and we eventually selected a left hand drive Hymer 544 which was configured with most of the items that were on our “must have” and “would like lists”.

Even though we still had about 3 months before we left for the UK we thought we would rather have the motorhome ready to go rather than to start looking once we arrived in the UK.

However, what this meant was that we were going to be making a considerable capital purchase “sight unseen” – something we had never done before and in another country and another currency.

Having made the decision to proceed with the purchase we then set about establishing a contract of sale with the current owners of the Hymer.

We sorted out the terms and conditions and the next step was organising payment – another small challenge.

The purchase took place at the end of November 2016, Michael picked up the Hymer a week later and arranged to have it kept in secure storage in Stafford until we arrived.

### **Paying for a Motorhome in the UK from Australia**

There are many and varied ways of paying for your motorhome in the UK from Australia – it is just that some methods cost much more than others.

We had been banking with Westpac for years, both personally and with our business and learnt the hard way that certain accounts carry very heavy monthly fees and operating expenses not to mention fees at both ends for an international transaction as well as currency conversion fees.

We put up with it for small transactions made overseas on the internet but decided that there was no way we were going to get slugged on the payment of the Hymer.

When we first became really serious about looking for the motorhome around February 2016 the spot rate for the AUD was around 49 GB pence.

When we paid for the Hymer on 30/11/2016 the spot rate was around 60 GB pence so we were considerably better off

We started researching Westpac alternatives and finally came up with XE.com as the vehicle by which we would pay for the Hymer.

They were very easy to deal with as we just needed to establish our identity with them and provide a copy of the bank statement from which our funds would come.

The payment was made at 1 AUD = 59 GB pence with no fees for us and no fees for the vendor.

The rate Westpac were offering was around 55 GB pence plus there would have been fees at our end and possibly fees for the Vendor.

Cleared funds were received in the Vendors account in around 2 business days

It was a very smooth transaction indeed.

So we had considerable savings what with the AUD going from 49p to 59p plus no hefty bank charges.

### **Registering and Insuring the Hymer in the UK**

To register a vehicle in the UK the owner must have a physical UK address – a post office box is not acceptable.

The address is used to send any speeding fines etc to.

A V5 registration document needs to be signed and then sent to Swansea to have the ownership changed to the purchaser.

The vehicle must have an insurance policy in place before it can be registered and taxed and an annual MOT (safety inspection and certificate) must be organised.

There was no fee for the registration transfer and the road tax was 175 GBP – the Hymer GVM is 3700kg.

Mike Steers from [UKmotorhomefinder](#) looked after everything to do with registration for us.

### **Insuring the Hymer 544 in the UK**

Insurance – what a nightmare for an Aussie in the UK.

Australians are treated like 3rd class citizens in the UK when it comes to insuring motorhomes.

As soon as an Aussie accent is detected most companies either hang up the phone or inform you that they don't insure Australians and refer you to Down Under Insurance.

Down Under Insurance is really the insurer of last resort.

I had 50 years of claim free motoring in Australia and zero demerits on my licence but they won't take that in to consideration.

Michael Steers from [UKmotorhomefinder](#) tried about 6 UK insurers for me and I tried about 6 but all refused and I ended up with Down Under Insurance.

The policy states that it is not renewable and that they won't send a reminder when the policy is due to expire.

The "Green Card" (a statement of which countries the coverage applies to) surprisingly includes Morocco and Turkey.

Countries excluded include Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Belarus, Israel, Iran, Moldova, Macedonia, Montenegro, Russia, Tunisia and Ukraine – coverage for those countries will need to be obtained outside of the DUI coverage.

The policy annual fee was outrageous and included an “admin fee” of 40 GBP and a credit card fee of 27 GBP.

The good things in the policy are that there is no limit on the number of miles able to be driven in or out of Europe, no time limit in or out of Europe and an excess of only 200 GBP.

The company is registered in Gibraltar and I hope we don't have to try to make a claim.

### Schengen Zone Impications for Australians visiting Europe

Firstly, I wish to advise that we have no legal or Australian customs and immigration qualifications and therefore you should make your own enquiries.

We can only pass on the results of our research and our experience of travelling in Europe over the past year on our Australian passports.

We have spent an inordinate amount of time researching what we call the “Schengen Challenge” for Australians travelling in Europe.

There are a group of countries in Europe who are collectively known as The Schengen Zone and this Schengen Zone is the area comprising 26 European countries that have abolished passport and any other type of border control at their common borders, also referred to now as internal borders.

Under the Schengen rules an Australian passport holder can't spend any more than 90 days within the Schengen zone, collectively – (that is all 26 countries combined) and then you need to exit out of the Schengen zone for a minimum of 90 days before you can enter the Schengen zone again, legally.

The Schengen Zone is largely unknown in some parts of the world - most people in Australia and the UK don't even know what it is.

If you are planning on travelling to Europe for more than 3 months and think you may need a Visa and or some sort of special Visa to travel in the Schengen area then don't bother contacting the Australian Dept of Foreign Affairs for any assistance because all they will do is fob you off and tell you to look at their web site and or to contact the countries you intend to visit for assistance.

We are currently travelling Europe for around 2 years (2017-2018) in a motorhome and planning to visit around 30 countries including most of the Schengen countries so to contact 30 countries before leaving is somewhat of a task.

We thought that with the number of Australians travelling overseas the Australian Government would be in a far better position than us to accumulate useful information regarding the rules and regulations for visiting European countries and in particular, the Schengen Zone.

The only benefit we have had from the Aust Gov is to receive Smartraveller updates which have been of no benefit to us at all – a short time ago we received about 15 updates in the one day regarding countries all round the globe and all that did was eat up our SIM card data allowance, big time.

So just to clarify the situation if there is no border and passport control when driving a vehicle from one country to the next so how can passports and visas possibly be policed.

On a couple of occasions there was physical evidence of where a border check point used to be, but that is all.

### Our Schengen Zone Experience

The following is our experience to date and you will see that we have not really tested “the system” fully.

We heard many varying stories prior to leaving Australia, even about entering Britain from Australia, so we took a few precautions, just in case.

Some other Australian travellers had experienced challenges in many or all of the following areas and so we tried to take steps to minimise our risks:-

#### 1 One way or return tickets

We were advised to have return tickets to Australia but as we had already booked one-way only tickets we elected to stay with what we had and take the risk.

Additionally, we were planning on travelling for around 2 years and unless changeable date tickets are booked (and you keep changing the return dates) it is not possible to book 2 years in advance. Changeable date tickets are usually more expensive.

#### 2 State of Health

We both visited our GP and had him provide letters outlining the state of our health and listing any past illnesses and any medications we may have been taking.

#### 3 Health Insurance

We had difficulty obtaining health insurance for more than 1 year, however eventually found an Australian company who would provide cover for up to 2 years.

They provide 1 year to commence and then we need to apply 1 month prior to the end of the first term to get the second year.

Additionally, we were able to suspend our Australian cover whilst we were away and have it reinstated with no penalty, on our return.

#### 4 Financial Health

Our Tax Accountant provided us both with letters stating how much we both had in our Self Managed Super Fund Accounts to indicate self-sufficiency, financially.

#### 5 Drivers Licence, Insurance, registration

I organised an International Drivers Licence through NRMA – by going in to one of their offices I was able to get one on the spot. Unfortunately, they are only valid for 12 months so I left extra photos and a signed form with my daughter and she went back to the same office and got a licence for the second year period and mailed it to us.

## 6 Vehicle Ownership

I organised a letter signed by the previous owner detailing change of ownership including date, place, amount and vehicle information.

Our on the ground experiences are as follows:-

On arriving at Heathrow from Australia we stood in the Customs and Immigration line a little nervous about the one-way ticket but confident about all else.

The Immigration Officer, complete with turban, dark beard and an accent from the sub-continent asked us only 1 question – “How long will you be staying in the UK?” – “1 week” was our answer – he then rubber stamped our passport with the date and through we went – the stamp includes the text “Leave to enter for six months. Employment and recourse to public funds prohibited”

A week later (and having picked up our motorhome) we were booked to go across the English Channel on a car ferry to France, therefore entering the Schengen Zone.

The French Immigration Officer looked at our passports, asked no questions, rubber stamped them with the date and a symbol indicating we were entering France via car ferry and waved us through.

After about a month as we were driving along a German motorway we were pulled over by a German police car – we immediately thought the worst.

The German police officer informed us our bike covers were blowing around in the wind – he did not ask to see our drivers licence or passports – end of our conversation with him – he wished us a happy journey.

On exiting the toll booth on the Swedish side of the Oresund Bridge (\$160 dollars poorer but richer for the experience) we had our passports checked by an Officer – he merely checked to see that the passport photos matched our faces, wished us a happy journey and waved us through.

On exiting Latvia going in to Lithuania our passports were checked - he merely checked to see that the passport photos matched our faces, wished us a happy journey and waved us through.

The first real test we thought was when we returned from France to England via the Chunnel.

We needed to return to England to organise the MOT (safety inspection and certification) for our motorhome which was due to be completed by the end of November 2017 (an annual event unfortunately).



As we had been in the Schengen zone for eight months we were waiting nervously in the queue as we slowly crept towards the French check point.

The French officer merely scanned our passports but did not rubber stamp them and waived us through.

We then progressed to the English check point where once again we were asked “How long will you be staying in the UK?” – “1 week” was our answer – he then rubber stamped our passport with the date and through we went – the stamp includes the text “Leave to enter for six months. Employment and recourse to public funds prohibited”.

Around a week later we returned to France via car ferry and the French Immigration Officer looked at our passports, asked no questions, rubber stamped them with the date and a symbol indicating we were entering France via car ferry and waved us through.

We have never been asked any other questions either by police or border officers.

On several occasions we have passed mobile roadside inspections points where we have slowed down to pull over but have been immediately waved through by the officials.

We thought we may have been checked when we travelled from Brindisi, Italy, to Igoumenitsa, Greece, by car ferry but no checks were made at all.

We travelled around 60,000 km through 26 countries and were never questioned about our length of stay in the Schengen Zone.

When passing through one Schengen country to another most times there is not even a sign indicating you are entering another country – so you don’t really know which country you are in.

#### **Fridge/Freezer Management in a Motorhome/Caravan:**

Without doubt, if you have a choice, the better option is definitely a 2 door fridge/freezer rather than a single door fridge/freezer.

Upright 3 way fridge/freezers may not run all that efficiently in warmer weather so careful planning is required to get the most out of the fridge/freezer.

Before costly upgrades and or switching to compressor fridge/freezers is contemplated it may be worthwhile organising your current fridge/freezer as best as possible.

The following is what we have found worked for us with a single door 3 way fridge/freezer:-

On an extended trip we cryovac our chicken, seafood, meat and bacon and freeze them before we go and arrange in servings of 2/packet so they fit nicely into the freezer.

Bring the fridge/freezer down nice and cold for a day or so before you start loading food into it.

If done properly we can fit many packets into the freezer and we then put the frozen bacon on the shelf immediately below the freezer, then the dairy products on the shelf below that, working down to fruit and vegetables on the bottom shelf.

It is better to **open the fridge/freezer as seldom as possible and to keep the fridge/freezer as full as possible** – it is the warm air from outside the fridge/freezer that is the enemy – when you open the fridge/freezer door the cold air gets dumped on the floor of the motorhome/caravan and the warm outside air goes in – the fridge inside air temp can easily go up between 4 and 8 degrees on just 1 opening.

Buy a wireless thermometer system with multiple sender units (one for fridge and 1 for freezer) with a remote readout so you can keep tabs on your fridge and freezer temps – Engel, Evakool and Waeco make them and they sell for around \$30-\$50 AUD.

Alternatively, we purchased a “weather station” from Jaycar Electronics which can accommodate up to 8 sender units and a remote digital readout which works well for us.

As you use up fridge contents it is important to put something back in to replace what you have taken out, to prevent warm air being able to rush in when opened.

Have a few items on hand such as small drink bottles or Tupperware containers filled with water which you can put in the vacant spaces in the fridge and freezer – another suitable item for this is varying shapes and sizes of isolite material ( the white packing used for appliance transportation) – it can be purchased in thin slabs which you can cut to your own requirements.

Upright fridge door seals degrade over time and the fridge then won't run efficiently and it is probably wise to replace the seals every 3-4 years - they are available from somewhere like Clark Rubber or online from <https://www.doorseal.com.au/> (no experience with these sites).

Fridge fans – putting 12 volt, low current draw fans inside the venting space grills works well – one at the bottom to draw cool air in and one at the top to expel hot air out (turn one round so one sucks air and the other blows air)– simply wire them in to your 12 volt leads going to the fridge and include either a small rotary on/off switch or incorporate a thermostat into the wiring circuit – fans from computer cases work well for this option - the fans can be attached to the grills using cable ties.

If you don't want to put fans in the venting space try to fit a shade over the vent grills to keep the sun off the back of the fridge/freezer and or remove the vents completely when stationary.

There are usually different classes of 3 way fridge/freezers available – your fridge class should be stamped on the plate inside the fridge – the classes are N (Normal) for up to around 32 deg C, ST (Sub Tropical) for up to around 36 deg C and T (Tropical) rated to around 43 deg C. – the T is the class recommended for Northern Australia or other hot climates.

If you want to install a compressor fridge you may need somewhere in the vicinity of 200 Watts plus of solar panels and 200 AH of leisure battery capacity to keep the fridge/freezer going and not drop your battery SOC too much.

A good DC to DC solar regulator/charger such as a Redarc BCDC1240 40amp DC-DC battery charger will boost the output from the solar panels and have your leisure batteries charged in no time at all – this model has an inbuilt MPPT solar controller built in as well.

An MPPT solar controller can be up to 30% more efficient than the older style, but cheaper, PWM solar controllers.

### **The Challenges of Driving a Motorhome in Norway**

I am probably going to get into trouble with other Norwegian Motorhome travellers for some of my comments, however, I am writing this exactly as I see it.

Maybe my thoughts have been influenced by the fact that we got off to a bad start in Norway in that we received a 600 NOK (about \$100AUD) parking infringement before we had even spent 24 hours in the country and the fact that we had absolutely atrocious weather during our trip, which coloured our experience, somewhat.

Firstly, let me say that Norway is an absolutely stunning country – one of the prettiest places, scenery wise, that I have visited, however, as a motorhome driver, the most frustrating country to drive in that I have ever visited.

On several occasions I was tempted to pull the steering wheel across to the east to head to Sweden to get back to a country where I might be able to restore my driving sanity, but each time the scenic beauty held me in Norway.

The authorities in Norway remind me of the authorities in one of our local government areas on the far north coast of New South Wales, Australia – Byron Bay Council – except that Norway is like Byron Bay on steroids.

The attitude seems to be as follows:-

We know we have a beautiful country

We really want to keep it for ourselves

We really don't want you to come here as tourists (and there are so many of you)

If you insist on coming here then we will extract as much money from you as we can whilst you are here

### **Parking, Camping and Signage**

Norway is great for the motorhoming tourist as in Norway there is an ancient right of freedom to roam the land, which became law in the 1950's and is known as "*allemannsretten*".

It means you can free camp anywhere under the conditions listed below, although we came across exceptions to some of these conditions:

- You need to be a minimum of 150m from private dwellings
- Your stay is to be no longer than 48 hours
- Don't stay if there is an official sign requesting that you don't park there overnight
- Don't erect sun awnings, chairs and tables etc
- Be aware of the rules regarding campfires in summer

Signage regarding parking and camping is very confusing – some signage has text only most of which is in Norwegian only – fair enough it is Norway after all but many other countries usually have the text in 3 languages – the home country language, English and German or French.

Signage which can lead to confusion can be either “No Parking”, “No Camping” or “No Overnighting”. Apparently, you are considered to be “Camping” in a motorhome when you are “Parked” and have your sun awning extended or your tables and chairs and or BBQ outside of the motorhome.

If none of those items are outside of the motorhome then you are “Parking” and not “Camping” even if you are “Overnighting”.

There are some “Rest Areas” where the signage states something along the lines of “This is a rest area, you are welcome to stay and rest for a couple of hours after which time we request you to move along and make the area available for other travelers – there does not seem to be any specific implied statements about “Parking”, “Camping” or “Overnighting”

Additionally, there are some “Public Parking” areas which are controlled by “Private Parking” Organisations such as Euro :Park who run around in little cars trying to generate as much revenue in fines as possible.

Many countries also use symbols such as an image of a motorhome with a line or a cross through it which means no motorhomes and no text is really necessary but not in Norway – no symbols.

There are many service points for motorhomes which is great and they are known as Tomte Stations and there is usually signage well in advance of the station, giving you plenty of time to pull over.

They are usually free, and can be located in towns, picnic spots, petrol stations and near some supermarkets or even just outside Camp Grounds/Caravan Parks.

### **General Driving and the Road System**

The roads around the fjords are really narrow – 1 vehicle wide with what I call turn outs to allow for another vehicle but they are not always there when you need them

We have seen 2 vehicles forced off the road – tour coach drivers are really good but local truck drivers are not and some will try to push you out of the way.

There are thousands of motorhomes in Norway in July, particularly around the Fjords and in the Lofoten Islands – maybe 1 in every 3 vehicles is a Motorhome.

We started counting and our record was 15 in a row going the other way.

About 10 kms before Russenes we struck a real challenge of a tunnel - it was only 4.7 metres wide, unlit and had no centre line markings. Our Motorhome is 2.35 metres wide without the side wing mirrors (one on each side) so we assumed that the tunnel was definitely one way.

At the entrance to the tunnel we had a green light so thought that meant we could proceed without any traffic coming the other way, as is the case when we had struck road works in Norway - **wrong** - just after entering the tunnel we struck a car coming the other way - just as well it was a car and not one of the buses, trucks or another motorhome.

There are huge distances to travel in Norway, particularly if you go all the way to North Cape. However, travel is very slow because the roads are very narrow and winding.

Most of the time the speed limit is 80km/hour, however around the Fiords and in the Lofoten Islands it is virtually nearly impossible to get anywhere near the speed limit.

There are a lot of single lane roads with blind corners whilst still a single lane with passing places marked by a white M on a blue background which will slow you down – sometimes you need to be stopping in one of these every 100 metres or so.

One safe approach in these areas is to tuck yourself in behind a tourist bus and have them lead you through safely – they are professional drivers and are travelling these roads regularly – you will need to do well to keep up with some of them and there are plenty of tourist buses in these areas in the summer season.

Expect to spend quite a bit of time in tunnels, some lit, some unlit, which may help explain the road rule that you need your lights on all the time.

We marvelled at the ones with roundabouts in them and those that spiralled up through a mountain.

In some we would descend down for kilometres until we were under the sea, then crawl our way back out for several more kilometres.

Some are narrow, to the point passing places are used inside them, but these were generally not busy.

Norway also has the longest road tunnel in the world (over 15 miles long!) at Lærdal, but if you aren't in a rush then we'd recommend taking the Aurlandsfjellet Tourist Route which runs over the mountain above it.

The Laerdal Tunnel widens approx. every 6 kilometres and features a "light show" in the expanded space – it is a great spectacle.

It is worth sitting down and doing some planning, as to what you want to see before you set off, as to visit the main sights or drive the tourist routes you'll normally need to either take ferries or pass road tolls to get there.

On the ferries you are charged by your length - under 6m and you are classed as a car, over 6m and the price doubles, with more added on for each metre you are over that.

The vehicle costs advertised include the driver, then you have to pay for additional passengers.

Shorter ferries (10 mins) were around 100 Nok (\$16 AUD).

The ferries all took payment via credit card or cash.

You join the lowest numbered lane to queue and ferry employees will either walk the queue and take payment, or let you board first, then walk around and take payment and finally, for longer trips they may let you board then find a ticket desk and pay there.

Whoever's taking payment just asks how long your vehicle is, and how many additional people you have.

The onboard ferry ticket sellers are very friendly and courteous – we asked “is there a discount for seniors” and they always smiled and said “yes” but we found out later we were charged the same price as if we hadn't asked for a seniors discount.

## **Tolls**

Since April 2016 motorhomes are no longer charged the higher 'over 3.5 tonnes' rate, instead all tolls for motorhomes are the same as for cars.

There are warning signs that you are approaching a toll a couple of kilometres before it, then just before the cameras there is a sign telling you how much it will be

## **Petrol, Diesel & LPG**

Petrol and diesel prices change throughout the day and vary from day to day and place to place.

The cheapest day we found to be a Sunday, but other than that we struggled to find any sort of logic behind when they changed.

Both fuels get more expensive the further north you go, the cheapest we saw for diesel was around 11 Nok (about \$2 AUD a litre), the most expensive around 15 Nok (\$2.70 AUD).

LPG is no longer as widely available as it was a couple of years ago.

It looks like they are favouring electric car charge points instead.

LPG can still be found in most cities, sometimes tucked away on an industrial estate.

We used the [LPG Norge website](#) to find places to fill up, but there are other companies supplying it, so there will be more places than shown on here.

If using the [MyLPG.eu](#) website, check when the stations were last confirmed as being open as many of them are no longer there. Note – if using Finland to get to/from Norway there is no LPG in Finland, so stock up before you cross the border.

We couldn't see much uniformity between the LPG refill stations: some were manned, others you filled yourself. Some closed at night or on Sunday, some stayed open 24 hours. Some were fully automated. Some used the UK bayonet connector, others the French dish-style connector.

### **Road Rules**

We discovered a couple of road rules while in Norway.

In cities when there is more than one lane, the 'slow' lane is often only for buses and taxis.

Traffic joining from the right has priority on junctions which had no 'give way' signs or painted lines across the junction, and cars wouldn't hesitate to drive out onto the main road, so it's well worth being aware of this one.

### **Wildlife**

In the north of the country – particularly inside the Arctic Circle, you'll probably come across reindeer beside and on the road.

These semi-domesticated herds are owned by the Sami, natives of the north, who manage the herds but in general they roam free.

Reindeer have zero road sense, and don't much care about your vehicle when you are waiting behind them.

### **Tourist Information**

Tourist information by way of signage is almost non-existent.

We were excited when we saw the big White "I" on a blue background which for us meant we could stop and talk to someone and pick up some brochures and maps and do some planning for where we were going next – wrong - it meant there was a signage board on the side of the road advertising the restaurants and hotels in the local area.

### **Alcohol regulations and the effects on Tourism**

Alcoholic drinks with an alcohol content in excess of 4.75% can only be purchased at speciality shops which are government controlled (known as Vinmonopolet) and sometimes are quite difficult to locate.

Some brochures say they are usually only in areas of higher population but we did find a couple that popped up in smaller towns in remote areas.

These drinks carry an additional government tax of 25% making them quite expensive by Australian standards.

These shops are where you need to go to buy wine and spirits

Beer (up to 4.75% alcohol) can be purchased at supermarkets – most supermarkets are not open on Sundays and if they are open are not allowed to sell alcoholic drinks.

Be careful in selecting your drinks as alcoholic drinks sit right alongside alcohol free drinks and sometimes it may be difficult to tell the difference in Norwegian.

Be prepared to pay around \$5AUD for a single can or stubby of beer from a supermarket, however they are usually 500 ml not the usual 375 ml Australian size.

### **Safety**

No matter where we were in Norway we nearly always felt completely safe – the couple of exceptions being Oslo and NordKapp.

We had no reservations about wild camping completely on our own, however on a couple of occasions when we didn't feel really comfortable with the location we moved to somewhere else where we felt more at ease.

### **Weather**

Whilst in Norway we heard that Norwegians say there is no such thing as bad weather – only inappropriate clothing.

Well we had around 5 weeks in Norway and could count the number of sunny days with only a few fingers.

If you think you have a half reasonable photo opportunity then take the shot – don't think I'll wait till the sun comes out because it probably won't.

### **Supermarkets**

The cheapest supermarkets were Rema 1000 and Bunnpris, but they did lack a bit in range.

For a better range we used Kiwi, Co-op and Extra and Europris

All drink cans and plastic bottles have a 'pant' (deposit) on them, this is often in addition to the price on the label – usually 1 Nok for a can and 2.5 Nok for a bottle.

At the entrance to each supermarket you'll find a machine you can put your old cans (un-crushed) and bottles into; it will then offer you the option of having a voucher to the value of the deposits or giving the money to charity.



If you opt for the voucher you have to use it in that shop at that time, you can't take it with you and use it elsewhere, so keep it handy for when you get to the till.

### Getting Maximum Life out of 12 Volt Batteries in a Motorhome/Caravan

The name "12 volt battery" is a little misleading.

When a 12 volt AGM battery reads 12 volts it is nearly flat.

When taking a reading of the state of charge (SOC) of a battery it should be done when the battery is at rest ie when there is no charge coming in to or out of the battery, otherwise a false reading may be obtained.

The reading should also be taken up to a couple of hours after the battery has come to rest otherwise there may be some residual effect on the reading.

Please see a suggested state of charge chart for a typical AGM battery below.

Batteries like being charged or nearly fully charged – the more they are kept fully charged the longer they will last.

Even if a battery is taken down low only a few times it could have a detrimental effect on its life.

A battery that is regularly only taken down to 80% SOC should have a longer life than a battery taken down regularly to 50% SOC.

Percent of full charge	12 Volt DC System
0%	12.7
90%	12.6
80%	12.5
70%	12.3
60%	12.2
50%	12.1
40%	12.0
30%	11.8
20%	11.7
10%	11.6
0%	<11.6

## **Countries Visited**

### **England**

#### **South East England - Tuesday 14 th March 2017**

Left Canterbury and headed south to Bodiam in East Sussex.

The countryside is lush and green, with springtime colourful flowers growing wild in the fields, dotted with English castles and quaint pubs everywhere.

The vehicular traffic is very heavy at all times of the day.

Once off the motorways, the roads are so narrow and in many cases there is not enough room for a small car to pass, let alone Ziggy.

Not sure how we missed some of the on-coming traffic - could only be an inch each side to manoeuvre through.

The main reason for our trip to Bodiam was to purchase 2 electric bikes, set them up on the bike rack and then head back towards Dover to connect with our vehicular ferry to Dunkirk, France.

The only ferry time available on-line was **2am** so we found a safe place to park (next to McDonalds) and tried to get a little sleep before heading down to the ferry dock.

It was very difficult to sleep with the constant stream of fast food junkies who came and went at all hours.

Dover dock was like a huge city but fortunately with a little help from our sat nav and Lady Luck we found our way in the dark to the correct dock.

### **France**

#### **Dunkirk - Malo Beach -- France**

Left Ziggy in the lower decks of the ferry and headed to the lounge for the two hour trip across the channel.

It was not very comfortable in the ferry lounges however we managed to get a little sleep during the journey.

We arrived at 5 AM French time and set off in Ziggy to our first Aire (French overnight parking places for motor homes).

One of our first European challenges - driving on the wrong side of the road and in the dark and with all the road signs in French.

We encountered a few unknowns but thanks to our sat nav found our resting place at Malo Beach, in around 30 minutes.

We slept solidly for around 4 hours and upon awakening decided to do some sight seeing courtesy of a 2 hour walk along the beachfront.

There were miles of three storey town houses all with different designs butted together and dozens of restaurants and ice cream parlours on the beach promenade.

Considering it was quite cold there were people everywhere walking, jogging and riding bikes.

Headed off to the local shopping centre to try to find an ATM to get some Euros (the local currency) - Success so now our only immediate challenge is getting internet and phones sorted.

Next challenge was testing out our new e bikes. - What a hoot - travelled along the boardwalk weaving in and out of people, bikes, prams and roller bladers.

Will definitely invest in e-bikes when we get back home as we took to them like a ducks to water.

## Belgium

### Tournai – Belgium

Left Dunkirk and headed south east to Tournai, Belgium – about a 100 km trip.

It was difficult to believe we have travelled now through England Wales, France and Belgium in just over a week.

We parked up in an Aire in the middle of the Tournai Village.

Took a long walk through the village and visited Notre Dame Cathedral. (Tournai). - amazing to believe these cathedrals were built hundreds and hundreds of years ago and still standing.

The cathedral is currently undergoing a major refurbishment.

We have been blessed with perfect spring weather over the last few days and the locals are out in full force enjoying the warming sunshine.

The village square was filled with locals drinking and eating in a sunny open air atmosphere.

Hard to believe we are on the other side of the world though constantly reminded by the locals speaking to us in French.

### Boussu-Lez-Walcourt – Belgium

Headed off on a typical European morning - cold and overcast - but happily no rain. We are still getting used to Ziggy and the challenges of VERY NARROW streets through the towns along the way.

Once in the rural areas we are finding it easier as the roads are wider and less challenging.

The countryside is so lush and green - so different to our Aussie dry outback and countryside.

Little villages spring up everywhere and then back to narrow roads and more challenges around every corner.

Arrived in Boussu-Lez-Walcourt - What a find! - not sure what the name means but it is probably something like "Adventure land by the sea". - very picturesque as we are camped beside the water with only sloping green grass and a beach between Ziggy and the water.

This place does not officially open until the 1<sup>st</sup> of April but when it does we are sure it will be packed as it offers so many activities, particularly water sports.

35 Kms of walking and bike tracks so we donned our warmest gear and hit the tracks and it was absolutely freezing.

Came back for a couple of rums and watched the light disappear over the horizon (no sun set tonight).

### Saint Hubert - Belgium

We departed **Bousse-Lez-Walcourt for Saint Hubert** which is the European capital of hunting and nature.

The architecture here goes back to the seventh century when Saint Hubert's Abbey was founded and then subsequently rebuilt in 1729.

The locals were very friendly even if I couldn't understand a word they were saying – languages spoken in Belgium include French, Flemish and a little German in the north west but unfortunately where we are it is only French speakers and my attempts at German have Fallen on deaf ears.

Fortunately the girl manning the tourist office spoke very good English which helped us out immensely.

Grocery shopping in a supermarket is an interesting experience when everything is labelled in French, particularly when you get to the checkout with fruit and vegetables and the operator tries to tell you in French that you were supposed to weigh the goods yourself – ah well – “Non Francais – Australie” seems to help particularly when said with a smile and a “Merci”.

All the wine we have been buying comes in bottles with corks which we haven't seen for years at home.

Spent a couple of hours in a little bar which had over 100 varieties of local beers some of them as strong as 12.5%.

Very cold again today – got all the ski gear on.

### Bastogne - Belgium

Visited our friend in the tourist office again for some more info, then did a major shop in the local CarreFour Supermarket and headed for **Bastogne**.

Bastogne is famous for the battle fought there between the Allies and the Germans in the winter of 1944-45 which is better known as “The Battle of the Bulge”

This area was also previously invaded by the Germans in 1914 so can understand why the German language is not too well accepted here.

There are 4 or 5 huge monuments and museums erected in honour of the US 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division which was surrounded by the German 5<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division until the 27<sup>th</sup> December when the siege was lifted by General Patton's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army.

The Americans are somewhat heroes around here.

We are planning on heading to Germany tomorrow where at least we will be able to communicate with the locals, even if slowly.

## Germany

### Manderscheid – Germany

Armed with addresses given to us by our friend at Bastogne, we left our safe park in the centre of Bastogne and drove to the hardware store to purchase 4 items on our list that we needed for Ziggy.

First item was a water hose and tap fittings.

We used Mr Google on our iPhone to describe what we wanted and pointed this at a shop assistant.

He studied this very carefully with raised eye brows for a considerable amount of time.

We began to think Mr Google wasn't giving us much help here.

It wasn't until we spoke the word "hose" that the shop assistant smiled and directed us to the hose section – success at last – phew!

Water taps (when you can find one that has a top on it here are usually very close to chemical toilet dump stations so we didn't want to use these to fill up our fresh water tank without using our own hose.

We decided to leave the other items for another day as we had just gone through our own "Battle" with the French.

We smiled at our one triumph for the day and eagerly moved on to our next adventure.

We drove about 100km further through lush green forests and quaint homes and villages.

Took a wrong turn (not unusual) and discovered a new estate outside a village with unbelievably new modern homes – architecture though and building materials still in the old style.

We then drove through Luxembourg into Germany.

Wind farms and acres of solar panels are everywhere in France and Germany. They certainly are embracing alternative energy sources.

We both now feel at home as the road signs are in German and we can actually read and understand (most or should I say some) of them.

We spend the hours testing each other on German words – not sure who is leading the competition right now.

Heading off the motorway we take a sharp right and go down, down, down a very steep and windy road.

We hoped our sat nav wasn't heading us in the wrong direction as we had no way of turning around.

Then with great relief, we saw three other motor homes parked and breathed a sigh of relief.

Our home for the night was beside the beautiful rural Hotel Heidsmuhle which is surrounded by forest, a lagoon with ducks, swans and fish jumping in the water.

There are beautiful walks set up around the property and we ventured off for about an hour.

The reward for the exercise of course was to spend a couple of hours on the deck of this beautiful Hotel and taste the local Bitberger (or two).

We are now talking to the locals and enjoying a laugh as we speak our best German and people can actually understand us.

### Bingen on the Rhine – Germany

We reluctantly headed off from this beautiful place and would like to have stayed longer but we have a commitment to get to Biala Podlaska in eastern Poland (right out near the border with Belarus) for Easter (13<sup>th</sup> April) to visit relations - Barbara, Petr and their lovely daughter Kornelia.

We don't speak a word of Polish but thank goodness Kornelia and her partner Kamil speak excellent English so there will be many days of translating back and forth happening.

Barbara (through Kornelia) has helped me with documentation for getting my Polish Citizenship. We think we have now completed and submitted everything we need – fingers crossed.

Today we travelled through the beautiful Mosel Valley – with villages everywhere on the side of the river.

Acres and acres of grape vines coming right down to the water's edge.

The vines are not in bloom right now but I am sure we will taste many of the varieties grown here over the next couple of years.

Explored our first Lidl – very much like Aldi at home.

Beer and wine is so cheap here compared to back home so we stocked up with several bottles and headed off for our overnight sleeping place.

Not as exciting as the Hotel Heidsmuhle but they had free internet here so I am sure Rob will while the hours away this evening using the facility.

## Klingenberg – Germany

Another typical European day – overcast, cold but not raining. Looking forward to some sunshine again soon as we have not had the pleasure of sunshine since we left Dunkirk.

We remember meeting two very lovely British ladies when we arrived at the Aire in Malo Beach Dunkirk in beautiful sunshine.

They said they travel the continent regularly and “when the sun is shining, you stay put and lap up the sunshine as it does not happen very often”.

We think now that we can understand what they meant.

This does not stop us from exploring and making the best of every day even when it is cold, overcast and no sun!! The countryside is so beautiful.

Today we again travelled for approx. 100kms and arrived in Klingenberg Germany.

Our campsite is on the river but not one of our favourite spots to date.

We took off for a short walk to the town centre and again ventured into the trusty “tourist information centre” in the middle of town.

They advised us that we could get the elusive internet in a town called Worth just a short kilometre away.

We headed off and along the way we discovered an Aldi store so decided to venture in and see what was to offer.

We found some throw overs for our lounge and dining chairs (3) and then continued on our merry way to find this internet store.

Sadly, when we finally found the store, they had nothing to offer that was a reasonable price and suggested either Aldi or Norma's as an alternative.

We headed back to Aldi and with much difficulty purchased a package (but had no idea what we purchased).

Four hours later and a little tired, we came back to our safe haven in Ziggy and decided to leave the internet hook up until we were fresh the next morning.

Some words of wisdom to new travellers – make sure you have absolutely everything sorted in England before you head to the continent.

It will save you a lot of time and heartache - we have been told from friends following our blog that Vodafone is the best option for internet.

Strangely we have not found a Vodafone shop in our travels on the continent to date.

Also, anything you wish to buy for your motorhome should be purchased in England before you head over.

It may cost you a little more but will save you hours of time hunting it out in the continent.

### Hammelburg – Germany

Organising the internet hook up was proving quite difficult as when we found the help phone number and dialled the number, the operator spoke so quickly we had no way of understanding what she said.

We decided to go back to the internet company we had visited the day before and ask for help.

They obviously spoke German fluently and knew all about the internet so this was our best chance.

A couple of hours later we were connected and headed off to Munster about 3kms outside of Dieburg where Krys was born.

Beautiful little town, very modern and mostly very new buildings.

We didn't have an address where Krys was born nor did we have an address where her parents were married or lived. so after a short visit we headed off again.

We are staying in a Stellplatz right in the centre of Hammelburg and went for a walk through the town.

Strangely the first building we came to was an Irish Pub and were tempted to have a Guinness but decided to leave this until our visit to Ireland later on down the track.

We discovered a beautiful little town square and again because the sun was shining , the square was filled with chairs and tables ready for the locals to soak up the sunshine.

Surprise, surprise – we found a Vodafone store in the square – a little too late for us

Hope to take a ride on the bikes in the morning (if the sun is still shining) .

### Burgkunstadt – Germany

Woke up to the same, same and no different – overcast and cold (around 12degrees) in the morning so decided not to do the intended bike ride.

What a shame as the bicycle track looked very interesting.

Headed up town to Hammelburg to talk to the guy at Vodafone about future options for internet (we are sorted for Germany thank goodness but given the advice we have received from so many of our blog friends decided it was the best thing to do).

The guy at Vodafone confirmed what everyone has told us to – i.e. to get a sim card in each country we visit – best and most economical thing to do.

Left Hammelburg and again travelled the motorways and back roads to our next destination.



It is just so exciting as around every corner there is something different.

First the rural backdrop – green fields and beautiful scenery, passing through towns along the waterways and as you reach each village, you are greeted by alpine houses rendered in various pastel colours – pink, blue, violet, green and gold.

Nothing looks open here - the doors are shut tight to keep the cold out and only when you stop and test the door, you find it open and locals there to greet you - what a wonderful world this is.

Ziggy has not let us down - we are so happy with the layout – the bed is just unbelievably comfortable and snug at night and the lounge/dining area so spacious.

The dinette area with café style seating is great for dinner and then to spend a few hours doing the research and planning for the next day.

When all that is done, the lounge is a full length 2 metres plus for the lucky person who nabs it first to lie in comfort and watch the TV (when we can get a satellite connection).

Our next village for the night was Burgkunstadt.

We are heading north now to make our way to Poland but want to stay in Germany as long as possible (to take advantage of our Aldi Internet for Germany).

We will try to avoid going through Czech Republic for now and cross the border far to the north east into Poland over the next few days.

We are camped again right on the border of town – with Aldi and our new found Edeka (another supermarket chain but with so many extra brands to choose from and lots more fresh food – though a little more expensive than Aldi) within a short walk.

We have also found our first hardware store – a supermarket more designed to please the male on board Ziggy.

The sun had come out and it was time to hit the bike trail again. Surprise, surprise, we found another Vodafone store – have been hunting for days to find one – now they are around every corner.

Packed up the bikes and then for our next task – how to fit the bike cover provided by our friend Michael Steers in Stafford UK .

You need a degree to fit one of these - the packaging did not give you any real fitting instructions, so for a frustrating hour we pulled and tugged and tried our best to put this cover around our E bikes.

Think Fiamma should put out a “Dummies Guide to fitting a Bike Cover” on the web for people with grey hair!!!!

We did it – hurrah! – but then discovered we had not fitted the bike alarm-lock system before we did the final zip up - ugh!!!

### Grunhain – Germany

Woke up to a beautiful morning – blue skies and sunshine – what a difference it makes to the way you feel for the day when you wake up to a morning like today - hope this is the beginning of many days of similar weather.

We stocked up on wine, beer and meat at Aldi and headed off.

After a two hour trip again through some unbelievable scenery we arrived at our next destination – Grunhain.

One of those very small villages in the middle of nowhere.

The Stellplatz was behind a restaurant and again on the outskirts of the village - no dedicated bikeways here so put on the walking shoes and headed for the village square.

Most of the village shops in Germany seem to close around midday on Saturday so the only places open after lunch are the pubs – well guess where we spent an hour or two trying to speak to the locals in our very best German - had a lot of fun and after a few beers left for a shower and bed for the night.

They have a beautiful tradition here for Easter where they decorate small trees with coloured plastic Easter eggs - the trees are around 1 – 2 metres high and most with no leaves so all you can see is the beautiful coloured eggs hanging from bare branches - also the houses have little Easter rabbits at the front doors - what a lovely tradition.

### Pirna – Germany

Couldn't find the first Stellplatz we were looking for – 'Schlosspark Pirna' - seems like it had been replaced with a new building under construction.

We drove round and round and found everything except the Stellplatz.

There are apparently 4 Stellplatz in this town so on to the next one - Elbaparkplatz was right on the Elba river.

No services at this one but the location was great.

We arrived here before lunch so off came the bikes and we were ready to explore.

Every man and his dog was out enjoying the beautiful blue skies and sunshine.

We thought the whole German rowing team was out on the river - we counted around 20 x 8 man boats out there.

We sat and had a well deserved rest while watching them go through their routines.

### Senftenberg – Germany

Wohnmobilstellplatz Buchwalde – right on the Senftenberg Lake – another beautiful sunny spring day.

We arrived here only to find that this motorhome park does not open until this Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> April.

We parked in the car park just outside of the gates and found someone who allowed us to stay outside in the car park for the night.

Just absolutely beautiful here and would highly recommend this place to anyone.

The bike track runs along the waterfront and seems to be never ending.

We biked around 15kms and there was no end in sight.

This park is open from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 1<sup>st</sup> November only but it appears you can park in the car park outside of the gates for a night.

They also have a grey water and chemical dump point outside which we were able to use – but fresh water is not available.

We rode by a marina with many shops and where the locals were out in full force – biking, rollerblading and walking - found the ice cream shop irresistible and indulged in a double scoop --to share of course, as we did not want to undo all the calories burnt off on the ride.

We are not using the batteries on the bikes so the exercise has been great.

Set up the BBQ for the first time and enjoyed a German rump steak (very expensive here) with a bottle of cheap French red.

Can feel the muscles in the tops of the legs so must have done some good today.

Might try and stretch the friendship tomorrow with the locals and stay another night - feel we need time off from driving as we have not stayed anywhere for more than one night so far.

### [Lohsa – Germany](#)

Thought we would head off mid morning to visit McDonalds which we sighted in town yesterday.

Though we have internet on Rob's Ipad from the Aldi SIM, it is not compatible with our laptop so we have not been able to update our travel website.

Tried to get the SIM out of the Ipad and put it in the Iphone and use hotspot but it was jammed in and there is no way we can get it out.

No luck with McDonalds – it has to be the only McDonalds we have ever seen that does not have a car park and is walk in only.

We drove round and round trying to find a car park with no luck. Time to move on. Didn't go back to Senftenberg and headed off again.

Only a short distance away we found Lohsa - right on a lake again with a bikeway all around the lake.

There are so many lakes and waterways in this part of Germany.

Met some great people from Dresden who spoke excellent English so spent the afternoon with them.

They have invited us to stay with them in Dresden and they offered to show us around – how good is that – meeting someone for the first time and getting an offer like this.

We thanked them and said we might visit them on the way back – but we probably won't as we don't like to intrude on other people's lives.

They left late afternoon to head back home so we were once again alone in a big camping area.

It will get busier come the weekend as that is when officially most things open here.

Shopping for food is an experience in itself - we can't read everything on the label so we go on sight mostly.

Chicken, turkey and pork are the main meat items (at a reasonable price).

We have not had a bad experience yet with choosing meats that are marinated (in what you might ask?) - cook it and then you will know!!

Bought two bike helmets at Lidl for an amazing 9 euros would you believe. They have to be better than none - we think.

Woke up Wednesday morning to an overcast day so took advantage of the day to find out more about what makes Ziggy work.

Time for some much needed washing and housekeeping to be done - what a breeze.

First person to wake up in the morning gets up and turns on the heater – the smalls get put in front of the heater outlet to warm them up (still very cold in the mornings now – still in single digit numbers).

Had a very relaxing day not doing much of anything except enjoying the view and the day off driving.

We have free camped (called wild camping in Europe) mostly to date, but here at Lohsa for ten euros a day, they provide everything including electricity.

We haven't needed electric hook up as Ziggy's solar panels and batteries have worked very efficiently.

Had a wonderful night just listening to music - our Ipod has over 2000 songs to choose from.

Had a Pink Floyd night with a couple of bottles of wine – tried to dance but the dance floor was a little bit small.

### [Leipe, Lebbenau – East Germany](#)

Rainy and overcast this morning - filled up with water, emptied grey water and black water and headed off.

Batteries are fully topped off and fridge has worked well on power – fridge seems to work well on electric and 12 volt but warms up a bit when on gas - think there may be a problem so will monitor over the next few days.

We are now desperate to find a McDonalds so that we can update the blog site and send news home to family and friends.

Thank you to family and all our friends who have sent us messages and well wishes over the last three weeks - hope to be able to answer some emails when we are internet rich!!

Have ordered some new equipment from Adam and Sophie at MotorhomeWifi UK which should help considerably and requested delivery to Biala Podlaska, Poland.

Will pick this up Easter time - whatever did we do before internet - we rely on it so much these days and only now realise how important it is to us during our travels.

Thank you to our blog followers who have given us advice on internet options available.

A crazy day today - we seemed to drive round and round and not find anything we were looking for.

The roads here are very narrow and with such a large vehicle as Ziggy, we don't know how we managed to get past cars let alone all the trucks that travel on these very narrow roads.

Local people are so used to this here and are very obliging (mostly) when they see us coming.

Finally, after many hours and some unbelievable back roads we arrived at a Stellplatz in Leipe near Lebbenau.

It is a resort with a restaurant and waterway at the back which during the summer months would be full of guests rowing and paddling through the waterways.

No one here right now as they are closed until 1<sup>st</sup> April.

Fortunately the owner who was working on the restaurant took pity on us after we told him we were from Australia (he has a brother in Adelaide) and allowed us to stay the night.

We headed off around 5pm to a restaurant and resort about a kilometre up the road and had a few well deserved beers and some German hospitality.

Really beautiful resort but again not many guests staying yet.

Lesson learned – never ask for an item not on a menu or on a blackboard without a price (German eye fillet with spicy red cabbage – had to have the cabbage to see if it was as good as Mum used to make – was not disappointed) – cost us a pretty penny but we went home at twilight after a great evening.

Came home to a not so cold fridge and decided it was time to do something about it the next day.

## Senftenberg – Germany

After some research on internet, we found a place that should have been a repair and service place for our Dometic fridge in a large town nearby Cottbus.

Sadly they said they don't do work like this and directed us to a town nearby – only a half an hour away - so we headed off again.

This time we were told again that they didn't have anyone there to help us but as we were about to walk out the door, a tradesman said he knew something about these fridges and took time out to have a look at Ziggy - appears we need a new part and he said to come back on Monday and he would be able to fit it.

We decided then and there that it was time to chill out in one of our favourite places that we have been to date - Senftenberg.

Passed by a Mcdonalds in Cottbus so in we went and spent an hour updating the blogsite (and having some unhealthy Maccas at the same time). Think the next visit might be just coffee and maybe a muffin.

To our surprise when we arrived at Senftenberg the gates to the Stellplatz were open and already 8 out of the 12 spots were taken.

The Stellplatz was not due to open until the next day but we were so happy we got in early and found a safe and beautiful place for the night.

## **Saturday and Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2017 – Senftenberg – East Germany.**

A beautiful sunny day today and for the first time in our travels we were in a site where there were a dozen motorhomes surrounding us - all with German numberplates - still to find a fellow English speaking motorhomer.

We spoke with the manager of the Stellplatz who was so impressed that we were Australian that she said she would take a picture of our booking form as she had not had any Australians stay here ever.

Only 11 euros a night and that includes a waterfront site with power and water - we booked in for two nights and happily headed off to the bike way for a much needed ride.

We biked for hours and eventually headed into the centre of town - we are so amazed that biking is a way of life here and cars are very respectful of bikers.

The markets in the town centre were still open so we spent time looking at the local wares.

Lots of interesting looking sausages and meats though not sure if Rob's Aussie stomach is ready for some of these yet.

Headed back to the waterfront and stopped in at a waterfront restaurant for a delightful lunch – salmon is so cheap here – thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon in the sunshine and then headed back to Ziggy for some reading and relaxation before the sun set for the evening – no dinner tonight – we are still both full from lunch

How the weather changes so rapidly here – woke up to a vastly different day – cold and overcast so sat indoors for a wee while reading until the sun tried to pop out and off we went again.

This time we almost did a complete lap of the lake, stopping regularly to take in the sights and lovely little villages along the way - even a sailing boat out on the lake today - appears here that people are not stopped by the inclement weather.

Stopped in at a waterfront café and had a bratwurst roll and a cold beer.

Around 300 motor bikers rode past the square with probably 50 or so stopping in the square to join us for lunch - mostly grey hairs just like us but out for a day on their motor bikes - the bikers outfits were just unbelievable – very trendy.

Met up with our neighbours at the Stellplatz who were again from Dresden – lovely people again and very keen to spend time with us – didn't speak English but we got by with our German and think they understood most of what we were talking about (we will never know but it was fun).

They told us about a great Stellplatz about 5kms out from Dresden Central - it was also a Hymer dealer and repair place called SchafferMobil - we decided to give it a go instead of going back to Cottbus.

### Dresden - Germany

Found SchafferMobil easily – like a small city with every conceivable type of motorhome in the front yard – mostly Hymers so we are very optimistic that they will be able to help us out.

Out the back of the dealership was where the motorhome park was located, set among rows of hedges separating each lane – very green and lush and they have wi-fi included – hurrah!!! - guess what we will be doing this afternoon?

After a couple of hours of computer work it was time to stretch the legs. We found a huge shopping centre called Elbe Park around 600 meters away.

It had every conceivable shop you could ask for.

Dropped into some internet shops to find out more about the types of SIM cards that are available and did a little food shopping.

Came back and met with the service people who have assured us they can fix the fridge problem in the morning.

We have a repair to the driver's door (that Rob broke) that needs doing as well so will probably be here for a couple of days.

The latch on the inside driver's door gave way during week one (Rob pulled it way too hard) so we have had to wind down the electric window and open the door from the outside - no problems with the outside mechanism though.

Our alarm system will not work properly until we get the door fixed so this will be a must while we are here.

Spent the evening enjoying the luxury of having some internet.

### **Tuesday 4<sup>nd</sup> April 2017 – Dresden Germany**

Bought a family transport pass for 9 Euros which allows both of us to travel by bus or train anywhere in Dresden for 24 hours. Good value as the nearest stop is just down the road from where we are staying

We went to the historic part of the city - many of the buildings here were built in the 1500s and are just beautiful - they have either done a great restoration job and or were lucky because there were some massive bombing raids carried out by the RAF and the USAF in February 1945 – 1245 bombers attacked the city for 3 days and nights.

Our first real sign of Tourists – saw a couple of tour groups of Asians and Americans – they stood out so guess we do too.

We went to a McDonalds to get some Internet and I couldn't believe it – there was a sign saying that it cost 0.50 Euro to go to the toilet – never seen a charge anywhere else to go to a McDonalds toilet– that was just the first part as to get to the toilet you had to feed the money in to a machine and then hope that the turnstiles would open to let you through – then you needed to go through the turnstiles again to get out – knew there was a reason why I have never liked McDonalds.

Some of the Dresden sights were amazing – many great sights are grouped together in the historic part of town – the whole area is illuminated at night

In the afternoon we caught a tram to the Military Museum – a Museum spread over 4 floors with exhibits of the German army from 1300 to the current day

The main emphasis is on the two world wars and we thought there may not be any information about Hitler and the Jewish situation but to their credit there was – but not a whole lot.

### **Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2017– Dresden continued**

Came home from a great day touring Altstadt (Old Town) Dresden - the tram and bus system here is very good so was not hard to find our way back. - we came back full of the hope that our fridge would be working.

Ugh – after about an hour, we noticed the fridge was getting hotter again - the service department was now closed so we took readings for a while and then put the fridge back on electricity.

### **Wednesday & Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> April 2017– Dresden**

Dropped back into the service department first thing - the receptionist saw us coming and alerted the troops that we were back again.

We could tell by the look on her face that they were getting a little tired of us now.

The service manager arrived promptly and we gave him our trusty piece of paper logging two hours of time with temperatures getting hotter in our fridge.



We did not have to say anymore and watched as he conferred with other service personnel.

To cut a long story short, he eventually rang Dometic directly and ordered a part which he said would arrive on Friday (another two days or so here in Dresden was not a problem as it is such a great city).

We still could keep our deadline to be in Warsaw by the following week - spent the rest of the day catching up on paperwork, reading and walking,

The fridge part arrived around lunchtime Thursday and was fitted.

It was a small piece of metal the size of a green pea but as soon as this was fitted to the burner, the flame which had been an orange colour changed to blue.

We sat for the next hour or so keeping a watch on the gauges – colder and colder it went so it was time to go out and celebrate.

Decided to find another local pub with some good German food and set off on foot.

About two hours later and with sore feet we gave up – who could ever dream that you could walk for two hours in Germany and not find a pub on a corner.

We ended up at our trusty local pub just around the corner (we had been there the night before for a drink only) and had a beautiful German dinner of Pork Schnitzel and of course sauerkraut for me and potatoes for Rob, downed this with a couple of local beers and then headed back for a well deserved rest.

### Bad Muskau - Germany

Happily set off from Dresden with a fridge that was working better than ever (didn't get our door fixed so will have to wait until we get back to UK to get this done at the end of the year.

Again a typical overcast cold day and drizzle but we are learning that if you don't go out in this sort of weather then you wouldn't do anything – kind of getting used to it now except when we hear from back home about the sunny warm days.

The countryside is so green and lush and it is really beautiful scenery with lots of farms everywhere.

Arrived in Bad Muskau and camped in a Stellplatz at the top of town.

Again we were the only ones there (though one motorhome did arrive during the night).

Town was about 2 klms away so we put on our rain gear, took our trusty umbrella and headed down town to try to find a supermarket.

Had been running the cold food down because we were unsure about how the fridge would run but now – wow we could fill up the fridge – what a treat.

The German side was typical of what we had seen in other towns but once we crossed a bridge to the Polish side – things changed rapidly - it was like a huge flea

market set up with dozens and dozens of old run down shanty type buildings selling wares (mostly cigarettes and booze).

It appears cigarettes and alcohol are considerably cheaper in Poland than Germany so people come over the border in droves to stock up on cigarettes and alcohol.

Shoes, coats, lace, fruit and vegetables – you could buy practically anything - people arrive by chartered buses and people go out with shopping trolleys to stock up.

We didn't buy anything but really enjoyed the experience.

When we headed over the bridge back to the German side, police were stopping cars and checking their boots.

It appears that you are only permitted to bring one carton of cigarettes over the border when in a car and hefty fines are imposed for those that break the law.

Not sure what happens to the folk in buses as I am sure they had lots more.

Stopped in at a pub on the way back for an early dinner and headed back up the hill to Ziggy.

## Poland

### Olesnica -Poland

Horror shock – we were heading into Poland and didn't have any Polish currency (Zloty) only Euros and the banks were not open on a Saturday – had to get some money so asked the Stellplatz owner where the best place was to get cash.

He showed us on a map, the location of a couple of ATM locations on the Polish side - Rob sat with Ziggy in case he was asked to move - every little spot that looked like a parking spot was policed by a local vendor who rushed out and asked you for money to park there.

Eventually I was able to get cash out at a Bankomat but felt very uncomfortable about getting cash from anywhere other than a bank - have been warned through several blog sites to be very selective about where you get your money out.

### Zagan – Poland

We travelled to Zagan to the Muzeum Obozow Jenieckich – the POW Camps Museum of Stalag VIIIC and Stalag Luft 3.

One of Rob's favourite movies "The Great Escape" told the story of the Great Escape here during World War II - they have a great museum here and a reconstruction of Stalag Luft 3 showing the three tunnels (Tom, Dick & Harry) that were used for the escape.

More than 600 captives helped in building these tunnels.

The Stalag was built in the spring of 1942 and was designed for officers of the Allied Air forces.

In 1945 Stalag Luft 3 held more than ten thousand captive air force officers.

On 24<sup>th</sup> March 1944, 76 airmen broke free of the camp - 73 were recaptured and 50 were shot - only 3 made it home - 4 of the 50 shot were Australians.

There were several other camps in Zagan and at its peak over 300,000 prisoners were in the camps – around 130,000 died of starvation, the cold and or ill treatment.

We left Zagan and headed for Wroclaw to spend the night in the heart of the city in a stadium.

The first 40 kms were the worst stretch of highway we had ever encountered - the road was fully corrugated and it was like travelling 40kms with a speed bump every two metres. Ziggy shook, rattled and did everything except roll.

I think every bone in our body ached - but then the road just changed back to normal – thank goodness.

There were a few tourist sights we wanted to see in Wroclaw.

We arrived there in the middle of late afternoon peak hour traffic - such a big city and so busy.

Arrived at the stadium and were told that the stadium was closed for camping for the next five days so what could we do?

We headed out of Wroclaw city and headed for the country again.

There were several motorway rest spots along the way, but we have been warned through the blog sites that rest stops were the worst places to stay.

In frustration and as it got later we arrived at Olesnica and decided we would find somewhere in the town to just park for the night.

Found a large parking area just outside of the town church.

There were quite a few cars still in the parking area but there was plenty of room for us.

Rob headed off to speak with a couple of people and ask about the safety of parking here.

He met this lovely tradesman who was just packing up his car for the night and to our surprise not only spoke Polish but also German fluently.

Well guess what - Rob broke out in his best German and soon the lovely man told us to follow him as there was a hotel up the road where he played the guitar regularly and he would ask if we could park in the grounds for the night.

He was just so delightful and nothing was a problem.

We followed him up the hill and together the boys met with hotel reception and negotiated a spot in the car park for the night.

We thanked our angel in disguise who before we left him, offered us a bottle of his moonshine – he had a dozen in the back seat of his car – we declined gracefully.

We had dinner and a couple of beers in the restaurant (great food and lovely modern hotel) and tipped the staff on the way out.

They were so happy with the tip, they insisted we come back for breakfast in the morning.

We declined gracefully – as we were beginning to feel the pinch of so much good food and wine (and not a lot of exercise during the last couple of days).

### Chlebow at Lipce Reymontowskie - Poland

Woke up and spent a short time checking emails just before breakfast and heading off.

Horror, shock – there was an email from Westpac advising us that there were some suspicious transactions in our account and asking us to lodge a report to the fraud squad to investigate if the transactions had been approved by us, or not.

Having been warned about getting money from an ATM not in a shop or bank and remembering the location where I had drawn cash the day before, we immediately believed someone had accessed our accounts.

The next two hours were spent on the phone to Westpac changing all our passwords to be safe.

Our accounts had not been accessed so we headed off feeling much happier. Lesson learnt always phone the fraud squad first before believing anything in an email or giving out information in an email.

We had a late start but we knew where we were staying for the night so enjoyed again the acres and acres of beautiful countryside.

Poland is such a beautiful place - we have not had the time yet to experience much as we are on a deadline to get to Biala Podlaska.

Heading off the highway, we soon came to a very rural little village.

Only about 8 houses in the street and one of these is where we are camping for the night.

It was called “Bumerang” and is in Camperstop and ADAC books.

The sign on the gate showed us we were at the correct place but no one was home.

The homestead was locked up and no one in sight.

We looked up and down the street and only saw a little old lady and we thought that she would not speak English or any language other than Polish – ugh!!.

We decided that the owners would probably be home soon so began to back up into a driveway of a partly built house across the road and that was where we planned on staying for the night.

We were saved by the neighbour who came out and told us the owners were away on holiday and opened up the gates and lead us to the back of the homestead which was set up for mobile home parking.

He told us in his broken English that someone would see us in the morning for payment.

It was like an oasis in the desert - the back of the homestead was beautifully grassed areas allowing for around 10 motor homes.

You looked out across fruit trees to fields just freshly ploughed - again we were the only ones there.

Within a half an hour some people arrived and told us they were looking after "Bumerang" for their friends who were holidaying in Greece.

The couple were Dutch and spoke excellent English.

We had a great conversation with them and found out that the town was only a couple of kms away and would be an easy ride into town on our bikes to explore the next day.

We talked to them about whether we could get Polish SIM cards there as we were ham strung with no internet since leaving Germany a couple of days before.

They offered to come into town with us the next morning and help us buy our SIM cards.

Around 9.30 AM they arrived and told us that they had checked in their town about SIM cards and they were not available there but a small town called Skierniewice around 17kms away could help us out.

We started to pack up Ziggy to follow them but they said they would drive us there instead as this would be easier for us.

In the short time we have been here we have found the people we have met in Poland so wonderful.

Rob & Marie-Louise de Reuver were absolutely wonderful.

They stood with us at a Telecom Poland office and helped us to buy and have a SIM card installed for my Ipad.

I think we got 10GB of data for around \$AUD 8 for a month..

Marie-Louise then spoke to them about Rob's ipad which had our German SIM card jammed in the SIM card slot

We were then taken to a computer store where with the help of a Stanley knife, the storekeeper was able to open up and remove the jammed SIM card and then installed another SIM for Rob for around the same price.

Rob and Marie-Louise then took us to the village centre where they were setting up a market for Easter.

They told us where to buy the best Polish Sausages and we bought these and some home brewed local beer.

Then on to the supermarket where they helped us select some other Polish specialties they said we should taste.

Finally after a wonderful morning, they took us back to their house in Retniowiec for some coffee and Dutch cookies.

“Bumerang” is just a beautiful rural setting and we would highly recommend anyone to stay here for at least a couple of nights. the owners who were holidaying in Greece – Kazimierz & Jola Foks are continually upgrading Bumerang and currently are building a laundry there.

There are hot showers, WC, grey water discharge, fresh water and all for around 10 euros a night.

To Rob and Marie-Louise – thank you for taking the time to make our stay with you so unbelievably wonderful. Bumerang deserves to do well and we hope anyone following this blog site and visiting Poland – please visit here – you will not be disappointed.

### [Warsaw - Poland](#)

Reluctantly after two beautiful relaxing days, we left this beautiful rural setting, all batteries (ours and Ziggy's) fully recharged and headed for the Big Smoke - Warsaw here we come.

We didn't see much of the countryside over the next 100kms as we travelled only on the motorway which took us into the centre of Warsaw.

The new motorways have walls 3-4 metres high on both sides so we didn't see much of the scenery but it was an easy drive.

We settled in at Camping Majawa around lunchtime (only a couple of places in Warsaw to choose from). - very expensive compared to everywhere else we have stayed in - around \$42AUD per night.

It would have been beautiful when it opened many many years ago but now it is very run down and old and as it did not officially open until 1st May, very little had been done to it since last season - very badly maintained.

Its location is very central to the centre of Warsaw so excellent position for sightseeing but nothing else - power boxes were very rusty and looked unsafe - bathrooms were very antiquated with no hot water most of the time – so we showered in Ziggy

We received good news - an SMS from my relatives advising that I have been verbally granted Polish Citizenship - yeah!!! - 12 months down the track and now I have my first piece of paper (yet to arrive in the mail) - now to find out the next steps to get the end result - my passport.

### **11th April - 12th April 2017 - Warsaw –**

#### **Introduction:**

To Barbara Chilczuk (my wonderful and beautiful niece), Piotr (her husband) and Kornelia (their beautiful daughter and our English translator) I want to thank you so very very much for the warmth and friendship you have given Rob and myself, firstly during the last 9 months through emails and Skype calls and now for everything you have done for us and we have shared over many days.

Thank you Kamil, Magda and Margaret (Goosha) for helping with translations - we find it difficult and embarrassing that we cannot speak many words in Polish but my mother (born in Austria) and father (born in Poland) only spoke German at home. My mother could not speak Polish and so I didn't learn much Polish at home.

We have met so many beautiful people, Grandma Jadwiga (Piotr's mum and the best cook in Poland except from Barbara) uncle Mirek and their children and grand children, and many more people have accepted us as family here.

Many do not remember or were too young to remember my father and it has been very difficult to get much more information about his life here in particular during World War II and the years when he met my mother in Germany where I was born.

It has been one of my main goals for our trip to find out more information about those years as my mother and father refused to talk about the war years.

After discussions with family members here and visits to Polish Museums we now understand why.

Kornelia and Kamil met us at Camping Majawa mid Tuesday afternoon and from there we walked a short distance to the tram station which in only a few stops took us into the centre of Warsaw - the tram and subway systems are amazing.

First a visit to Warsaw Old Town whose history goes back over 700 years. This area was bombed to the ground during World War II and has now been reconstructed from scratch using old photos and drawings.

UNESCO has included it on its list of World Cultural Heritage. The Royal Castle is one of the most visited attractions here. The square is filled with cafes though as today has been bitterly cold, overcast and some rain so not many people are outside.

The King Zygmunt column towers over the square - it is the oldest and highest monument in Warsaw - the statue fell during World War II and was reconstructed in 1945.

We walked along cobbled streets and saw so many beautiful buildings - exact replicas of the old buildings and statues including the Mermaid Statue - a guardian and symbol of Warsaw.

Wednesday morning Kornelia took us to the Warsaw Rising Up Museum which is located in a former trams power station, a historical monument of industrial architecture from the early 20th century.

An amazing building by itself and the exhibits that are spread out over three floors are the best we have ever seen anywhere.

We spent nearly four hours there and learned so much about Polish history and the persecution of the Polish people, not only by the Nazis but also by the Soviets towards the end of World War 2 right up until around 1991.

Both Germany and Russia wanted the valuable farming land for themselves and Poland suffered and lost so many lives (around 9 million people).

We headed back to Ziggy to tackle the traffic getting out of Warsaw to travel towards Biala Podlaska - by train it takes less than two hours but by Ziggy we spent nearly 40 minutes travelling less than 1km before we could really get going.

Four hours later we arrived in Biala where we met Barbara, Piotr and Lily (their dog or probably their second child by the way she is treated) and sat down to a traditional Polish meal - the first of so many banquets over the next week.

### Biala Podlaska - Poland

The next day was still a working day so Piotr was unable to be with us today but after a sumptuous breakfast (again traditional polish food) Barbara and Kornelia drove us to the cemetery where my grandparents were laid to rest.

The polish people in Eastern Poland are very religious and true Catholics - Easter is their holy time and looking after the grave sites is paramount to them.

The cemetery is located in a beautiful green rural setting in Lipinki.

Every grave has flowers and lanterns and beautiful headstones - it was truly moving to see how well they look after their families after death.

We drove on to the town where my father was born, Kryzwowolka, a very small farming area of only a few houses and then on to other places where he and his parents lived.

I am a bit lost with the sequence of every day but we have twice had beautiful meals with Grandma Jadwiga (Piotr's mother) - the meals continue over many hours with visitors coming and going all day. It is a truly beautiful time where families spend their time going from one house to another.

They go to several daily masses starting from Easter Thursday and some of the masses go for 3-4 hours - there is standing room only in the church.

Easter Friday and Easter Saturday are days with no meat or alcohol consumed. We attended resurrection mass on Sunday morning with the family - a beautiful ceremony of the resurrection of Christ followed by mass - once mass is over the party begins!!!

A huge meal of a dozen varieties of meat and polish dishes hit the table and so does the vodka. - a procession of family members come and go all day - we eat and drink non stop - exhausted we went to bed in readiness of more eating and drinking and meeting new people on Monday.

I learned lots of bits and pieces about my dad and the things he did when he re-visited Poland after migrating to Australia in 1950.

Sunday afternoon at 4:50 pm it **started to snow** and is expected to be minus 4 degrees overnight with a max of 8 degrees tomorrow – thank heavens it is nearly summer.

All shops are closed on Easter Sunday and Monday.



Cakes of all kind are a tradition here and are eaten with nearly every meal - Barbara and Kornelia baked three massive cakes including black Forrest cake with home made black currant jam, another with jelly and berries and meringue and cream and the last, a traditional baked cheese cake.

We love the SWEET tradition but not good for the waistline.

Tomorrow we can continue with the epic struggle of getting a little further down the track to get my Polish Passport.

### **Tuesday 18th April 2017 - Biala Podlaska, Poland and surrounding villages**

Tuesday was our last day with Piotr as he was leaving Wednesday for around ten days. Piotr drives a coach and is currently taking a group of Russian tourists throughout Europe.

We headed off for some more sightseeing.

Below are some of the many places in the local area that we visited over the next week or so. There has been little time to write notes as each day is packed with so much - will try to provide information on some of the sites visited below.

**Shrine of the Podlaskie Uniates in Kostomloty:** a. Church with a valuable and beautiful iconostasis and relics of the blessed Uniate Marty's from Pratulin - The parish in Kostomloty (south of Terespol, close to the River Bug) was founded in 1631.

**St Anne's Basilica - Kodon:** a truly beautiful church with a lot of history and really worth a visit - Its setting is on acres of beautiful manicured lawns and gardens with small chapels scattered throughout

### **Lublin - Poland**

**The Lublin Open Air Village Museum** was established in 1970 - set in 60 acres of picturesque land it is one of the largest open air museums in Poland.

The area is composed of several parts reflecting geographical units of Lublin region - the museum preserves the historic images of villages, manors and provincial towns with their regional characteristic features of buildings and settlement layouts.

**Lublin Old Town:** - again another beautiful old town which was levelled to the ground during World War II and reconstructed to its original glory - whilst Warsaw Old Town was very special, Lublin Old Town has been our favourite to date.

We were in awe as we walked down each street – there are plaques on almost all the buildings with each telling a story about what happened there during the war.

We have always been interested in history but nothing can describe how awful it would have been for my parents and their families during those horrible years. My father never spoke about those times and now I certainly can understand why.

**Roskosz - Biala Podlaska** - a Government initiative involving educational activities including a bakery, wood making, masonry, weaving, sewing and metal work.

Set in what was a beautiful old farm dating back to the 17th century, the site now has a hotel, restaurant and function centre, the funds from which support the Roskosz initiative.

The main objective of The Roskosz initiative was the search for causes of low physical activity among children and young people and overcoming the tendency of excessive use of screen media and the Internet - groups of young people 14-18 years age come here and are encouraged to not only learn to enjoy sporting activities outside but also to learn skills from yesteryear.

The area to the east of here is very close to the border with Belarus.

We saw so much of the beautiful countryside - farms are everywhere as the soil is so rich.

We can understand why throughout history, Poland has been fought for and taken over by so many countries.

Progress with my Polish Passport is proceeding - wheels turn very slowly here.

My Polish Citizenship has been confirmed in writing now but to proceed to being granted a Passport I need to register my birth certificate and marriage certificate again as two other government departments have not accepted what has already been submitted to get my citizenship.

So it has been time consuming trips once again doing the rounds of the government offices, official NAATI translators and Notary Offices.

It would have been impossible to get this far without my relations here helping me - they have been so patient and we thank them very much.

Our lack of speaking Polish would have been a real barrier.

Hope by the end of this week to have these documents registered and a Polish ID card which should allow both of us unlimited time in the Schengen Area - time will tell.

### **Checiny - Poland**

Sadly we left our relations and friends in Biala Podlaska.

We departed with a bag of Polish goodies including home made Polish sausage and honey from Uncle Mirek (he currently has a couple of hundred bee hives on his farm), Pierogi (Polish dumplings) fresh farm eggs and lots of other delicious items - too many to mention.

Thank you Barbara once again for spoiling us - we will be back in a couple of weeks to pick up my Polish PESEL or ID card - this is now the last step before I can apply for my passport.

It truly has been an unbelievable exercise.

We left Biala Podlaska on a wet, cold overcast day - it is hard to believe we have had so many days where the temperature has not reached double figures.

There have been a couple of days during our stay where we have had sun, wind, ice and snow all in the one day - we sadly look at our summer clothes in Ziggy and wonder if we will ever get to wear them.

With our internet problems well and truly sorted out, we are really enjoying being able to do research for our trip.

We have our internet dongle now so the only challenge will be to get a SIM card in each country we visit as in our haste to leave the UK we missed out on getting the "3 Multi Country Sim Card" which would have covered us for around 20 countries.

We can only re-iterate to everyone embarking on a trip like ours - make sure you get a dongle and Sim Card BEFORE you leave the UK.

We stocked up on fresh supplies and of course the mandatory wine for me and beer for Rob at Lidl and drove on to a town called Checiny.

We struck an unbelievable amount of new roadworks and moved at a snails pace for nearly an hour - finally we arrived around 6pm - what a find.

Checiny has provided a fantastic area just below the entrance to the Royal Castle - whilst our area is shared by cars and buses as well, we have views from our windows of the castle up on the hill and the green valley below.

Tomorrow we are looking forward to exploring further - after a well deserved beer for the driver and a cold white wine for the passenger and a sumptuous dinner of Pierogi and other Polish goodies we hit the hay.

### **Saturday - 29 April 2017 - Checiny, Poland**

We headed up the hill to explore the Royal Castle - first real exercise we have had for a couple of weeks.

The castle was constructed in 13th and 14th century - re-construction of the castle was done in 2013-2015.

Entry fee is only about \$4.00 AUD - it is a tourist attraction now but is really worth visiting.

During the day there are displays of Polish folk dancing and knights jousting - spent an hour or so exploring and then headed down to the village.

It is the May long weekend here so many people have a five day holiday - bit like Easter back home.

The village square is a buzz of activity so we are expecting today is the start of lots of festivities.

We bought some fresh bread rolls and headed back to Ziggy to make some lunch and rest and read before we hit the village later in the afternoon.

There is a new restaurant right on the boundary of the parking area called Poziom Smaku - it looks really interesting - they put out deck chairs in the sunshine and provided a singer/guitarist (I forgot to mention today we had a little sunshine) - the restaurant guests sat basking in the sunshine while being entertained - some fell asleep in the deck chairs.

Later we ventured down to the village square which was now set up with a stage and seating.

People were dressed in traditional Polish folk costumes - we watched several displays of folk dancing, Knights jousting again, canon and Muscat fire, followed by a visit from the official party and then modern music.

Time to head back up the hill now - we hear canon fire from the castle as we head up the hill - think that might be the finale for the night.

We met up with the restaurant owner Marcin as he was closing the restaurant for the night.

Though Polish, his second home is Scotland, having worked and lived there for 6 years. He spoke excellent English and after a very short but interesting conversation, Marcin invited us to join him for breakfast on Sunday morning.

### **Sunday 30th April 2017 - Checiny, Poland**

Woke up this morning to beautiful blue skies so put on hiking shoes and headed for a long walk up the mountain before breakfast.

Spotted a deer crossing the track only a few metres from us - first one we had seen so we were pretty excited and then we headed back down to meet with Marcin for breakfast.

What a wonderful person- just one of the many wonderful Polish people we have met over the last few weeks - his restaurant provides only fresh local produce and everything is made from scratch starting with the local fresh eggs, Polish sausages, herbs grown on the his land right beside where Ziggy is parked, apple and pear juice, home made jams etc etc etc.

You can buy home made everything. The menu is extensive and everything no more than around 16zl - just over \$5.00 for the best food ever.

During breakfast Marcin said he would show us some places to visit in the local area.

We thought he meant on a map but no he took us out in his car and showed us the places we should visit during the day.

It was going to be one of his busiest days of the year (May day public holiday) yet he took the time to show us around.

A must do for all visitors to Poland - come to Checiny and stay here and have a meal or two with Marcin – Marcin's restaurant is [www.poziomsmaku.pl](http://www.poziomsmaku.pl)

Marcin is a real entrepreneur as apart from the restaurant he also has a business that makes fantastic plates for restaurants out of slate and oak - that business is [www.kookserve.com](http://www.kookserve.com) and he exports them worldwide.

We packed up Ziggy and headed to the University of Geological Science - we tried the front door – locked, but within seconds we were greeted by the security guard who told us to come back another day as the Uni was closed.

Marcin told us the view was to die for so we headed up a very steep hill at the rear of the Uni to the top and wow- he was right - we walked along the ridge line and the view was spectacular.

Two other places highly recommended to visit whilst here are the Vivid Historical Town and the Regional centre for Science and technology - both places were excellent and totally packed because of the May Day holiday weekend.

After a wonderful day touring and sightseeing we headed toward Auschwitz.

## Auschwitz - Poland

Woke up to a glorious sun filled day - not a single cloud in the sky - we parked directly opposite the gates to Auschwitz.

Decided on a really early start because we were sure that given it was a long weekend it would be packed.

Arrived at the ticket office at 7:30 am and joined the long queue - the gates opened at 7.30 and already there were a dozen coaches parked and people piling in from every direction.

We had tried to purchase tickets the evening before but were told we could only buy them on the day of visitation – so much for trying to avoid queues.

I would have thought Auschwitz could have handled ticket sales and crowd control better, given they have been running this Museum for around 65 years but they have no idea on this and the signage is appalling – still we are visitors to this country so just have to take it as it is.

We had been to Dachau near Munich Germany on a previous visit to Europe and thought we knew what to expect - wrong - again we walked around in silence from block to block and again were utterly shocked at the stories and vivid pictures displayed here.

Can really understand why my parents, my Dad in particular, having been in a Nazi prison work labour camp, would not talk about those years.

We only lasted a couple of hours before we both decided we just didn't want to see anymore - didn't take any pictures whilst inside - just didn't have the heart and wanted to show a little respect.

Packed up Ziggy and headed for **Wieliczka** near Kraków only 90 minutes away.

## Wieliczka - Poland

Found a great spot only 100 metres from the entrance to the Wieliczka Salt Mine - again a spot with mixed parking so by the time we arrived late afternoon, there were very few spots left but we managed to just squeeze Ziggy in.

We went to the ticket office to buy tickets for the next day but once again were told we could only buy tickets on the day of visitation.

The tour through this amazing place which is one of Poland's National Monuments (and a UNESCO listed site) takes three hours to complete and goes down, down, down with around 400 steps to the bottom.

A bit like a spiral staircase to begin with and then about two thirds of the way down it opens up to numerous miner's passages and caves where statues are formed out of rock salt.

Four massive cathedrals with magnificent statues have been carved out of the rock salt and at special times of the year (Easter and Xmas) they hold mass down there. You can even hire the main cathedral for your wedding - around AUD\$2000.

Gratefully the way up is much easier via lift - definitely put this on your list to see.

They provide an English speaking guide and cost is around \$AUD30.

When we returned to Ziggy it was going on dusk and we found the car park empty - all alone again with the whole place to ourselves.

### Kraków – Poland

Didn't want to stay in the Wieliczka Salt Mine car park another night and found another place closer to Kraków that sounded much safer and secure - Caravanning Elcamp Is a motorhome dealership and service centre (closed today because of May Day holiday) with a high fence and fully locked security gates.

There is a security guard here who is absolutely delightful - doesn't speak English but again with sign language and a little help from Mr Google he was able to give us enough information about bus timetables - buses leave directly from across the road every 20 minutes.

We hailed the bus and showed him our piece of paper with Kraków Old Town written (in Polish of course) on it - he nodded and then later told us when to get off as we needed to link up with a tram from there to the centre of Old Town.

We couldn't believe what we were seeing - we were stunned as we stood in the square - words couldn't describe it.

A fairytale square lined with beautiful old churches, buildings and towers and restaurant after restaurant set along the boundary, each with colourful flower boxes acting as borders and huge colourful umbrellas.

Heaters under the umbrellas to keep you warm with hundreds and hundreds of people enjoying a holiday day in the square which is 200 metres by 200 metres.

Entertainers in colourful costumes were trying to lure you into shops or to take guided tours of the square.

Beautiful horses adorned with plumes and braids and wearing colourful outfits of gold and silver took tourists around the square in fairytale white carriages.

There was so much more to see even in the streets outside the square that we decided we would come back in the morning.

We sat in one of the many restaurants in the square to enjoy a late lunch/early dinner and just watch the crowds go by - really looking forward to tomorrow as Kraków has so many things to see.

Took a taxi home as it was beginning to rain and then settled in for a quiet but safe night.

Three motor homes had come in while we were away so for a change we have some most welcome company tonight.

### Wednesday 3rd May 2017 - Kraków, Poland

Today is Commemoration Day and Polish flags are flying and from the web we discover that all attractions are closed today.

We decided to catch up on some Web home work and then set off for a big walk. Had read on the blog sites there was a great bar/restaurant called Czarci Grill nearby so tried to find it.

A couple of hours later we came back with no Czarci Grill in sight - we headed past our camping spot and in the opposite direction and only a hundred or so metres we found it.

The building looked like the witches house in Hansel & Gretel - a small wooden cottage with a doorway that only a dwarf could fit through - it was past lunchtime so decided to treat ourselves to a lunch/dinner and so ventured inside.

All I can say is wow, wow!!!! - inside it was just as impressive with a log fire burning, low ceilings, dim lights and the smell of delicious food cooking.

They have a parrot inside in a huge cage and it wolf whistles the girls when they come in and sings and talks all day – even makes sounds like coughing and a phone ringing.

We spent a couple of hours there and after the best family size pizza we have had in yonks and three beers (cost less than \$20) we headed home with a doggy bag of leftovers for breakfast next morning.

#### **Thursday 4th May 2017 - Kraków Poland**

It rained quite heavily all night but woke up to an overcast day (no rain) so headed into Old Town by bus and then tram.

There was nowhere near the number of people in Old Town as Tuesday so the atmosphere was not as great.

We booked our tickets for the Kraków Underground and then headed up the hill to Wawel Castle - the Underground can be booked in advance and usually requires booking several days in advance but we were lucky to get a cancellation on the day we were there.

The Krakow Underground (Rynek Underground) is not a rail network but is an underground museum covering 4000square metres with interactive displays of the history of Krakow dating back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century - so the square is really 200 metres by 200 metres above ground plus the 4000 square metres underground.

Wawel Castle is an unbelievable castle set around its own huge square - tall cathedral spires, turrets and domes of gold were only a part of the structures within the castle walls.

From inside the walls, there were spectacular views of Kraków and the river it stands on.

Just as we were leaving the castle, the rain came bucketing down and so we took shelter in a little old pub and after a few “mad dogs” (vodka shots, raspberry juice and Tabasco) braved the rain and headed back to Old Town square for a 2 o'clock booking to see Kraków Underground.

Really interesting tour showing that under Old Town Square, they discovered in 2006 an old city that was built underground.



They carefully excavated the whole square and turned it into a tourist attraction keeping the original walls and sculptures of the old city in tact.

We took a taxi home and then had another delightful dinner at Czaci Grill.

If you are wondering why we seem to be staying overnight in some dodgy spots it is because there are not many Motorhome camping spots in Poland.

For example in our Touring Books and Apps there are over 7000 Aires (Camping spots) in France alone, but just 22 in Poland.

### **Zakopane - Poland**

Woke up to a foggy morning with very little visibility so decided to stay until it lifted a little.

Sadly, we departed Kraków - such a beautiful city and so much to see - we only saw a little but what we saw will stay with us forever.

Heading south, the countryside and the houses took on more of an alpine look - after only a half hour or so we turned a corner and there in front of us were the Tatras Mountains still covered with heaps of snow.

Skiing has been a passion of ours and our kids have grown up with the same love of snow and skiing - the sight of the snow really was special and we look forward to the time when we can spend some time in the snow before heading back to Oz.

We stocked up with supplies and found our next camp spot - Camping Ustup, about 4kms from the main ski village in Zakopane.

Though a little more expensive than other places we have stayed at in Poland, it has the best and newest shower and bathroom facilities.

Ideally located right next to a river, pizza restaurant, supermarket and service station, and for fast food junkies MacDonalds is right next door.

The bus stop to go uptown to the village is just across the road and costs about \$1.00. We have been told that transport is free if you are over 65. Haven't taken advantage of that yet.!!!

Bit late to head to the village today, so decided to take a long walk instead - the walk was just delightful with so many beautiful ski lodges along the way.

We were told that it was only a couple of weeks ago that the snow was around 2 ft deep here in this village.

### **Saturday 6th May 2017 - Zakopane, Poland**

A bit of sunshine today, so decided to hand wash some clothes and take advantage of the clothes lines provided here - rare to find these anywhere.

After we had hung out the clothes the manager advised us that we could have used the washing machine in his house - expect there would be a cost but would have taken advantage of this if we had known.

Packed all the winter woolies in the backpack and headed for the bus stop.

We had just missed a bus and it was another 45 minutes to the next one - ugh!!



Just as we were considering our options - along came a horse and carriage. We had seen these the day before on our walk, so we hailed the driver.

He didn't speak English but when we asked him what the cost was to take us up the 4kms to the village he showed us a 50 Zt note (about \$17AUD).

Given that it was only 6 Zt for the two of us by bus - I said "no".

He then pulled out a 20 Zt note - yep that was better so we climbed in and played Tommy tourist".

It was just so cool riding in the horse and buggy - really enjoyed the whole ride - still can't believe he reduced his price to less than half.

He dropped us in the centre of the village and pointed in the direction we should go.

Through Fashion Lane we went and at the end it opened onto Krupowki Street which boasts being one of the most famous streets in Poland.

A tourist Mecca of restaurants and shops that stretch for 1200 metres.

Lots of winter clothing sales were on with some going at up to 80% off - needed some winter clothes so found a bargain or two.

At the end of this street we found the markets - hundreds of stalls going in every direction.

Lots of souvenirs, shoes, clothes etc and of course food stalls.

We looked in amazement at all the food items we have never seen before and cannot even fathom a guess as to what they are.

Next we headed to the northern part of the street where the cable cars go to the top of Kasprowy Wierch Peak – at 1987 metres - not very expensive to take a return trip up in the cable car around 27 Zt (\$9) but less for over 65's.

We were just about to book our tickets when we heard the thunder and looked up the mountain to see the sky was black and the rain was on its way.

A quick sprint back to the main square where we took cover in a restaurant and spent the next hour or so watching people getting absolutely drenched.

Time to head home and maybe, weather depending, come back tomorrow to venture up the mountain.

Bus trip back was not as exciting as the horse and buggy but a lot drier I think.

Arrived home and found that the manager had taken my clothes off the line - you little beauty- what a mighty mighty man.

## Slovakia

### [Mosovce – Slovakia](#)

Woke to rain, wind and cold so stayed put for a short while to see if it was going to change.

Not happening today so at around lunchtime we opted to move from Zakopane to Slovakia and back to Euros which we felt more comfortable with.

Hard to believe we have only been away two months today - feels like we have been away a lifetime - seen so much already and still have 22 months to go (maybe, or maybe longer).

It was so noticeable when we crossed the border in to Slovakia.

It was as if someone put a line on the road which went from being reasonably good on the Polish side to absolutely woeful on the Slovakian side. - fortunately after a few kilometres it improved, somewhat.

Slovakia is only a small country with 80% of it being farmland and once on the other side of the Tatras Mountains, the sun appeared and the countryside with its beautiful hills and valleys took on a kaleidoscope of greens.

From Autumn shades to pale lime green, rich lime green, luscious green green to emerald - so many shades of green all together - tried to capture this in photos but none I think could do this sight justice.

Had a couple of hiccups trying to find our camp for the night - firstly the sat nav took us off the main road and up some unbelievably narrow dirt roads.

We stopped at the first opportunity and checked our co ordinates - nothing like we had keyed in.

We started again and had to backtrack 30 or so Kms.

Then, I am sure, other fellow travellers have experienced the next moment when we arrived at our destination to find a notice on the gate advising it was closed due to reconstruction.

My driver remained calm (on the exterior only, I think) while we looked for the closest camp for the night. Time was moving on and it was around 6pm at this stage.

Our Polish Sim cards do not work in Slovakia so this made researching an alternate site for the night more difficult – thank heavens we have purchased a couple of Ipad Apps which incorporate off line mapping

We arrived at our alternate site, Autokemp Drienok, Mosovce at around 7pm - it was still light but the cold was setting in quickly. Yeah!

The gates were open but no one was anywhere to be seen – no campsite attendants or no fellow travellers.

We parked and had a shot or two of our new found drink to warm up - vodka with dash of raspberry juice and a half dozen or so drops of Tabasco - warms up the belly in no time.

### **Monday 8th May 2017 - Mosovce, Slovakia**

This place would have been amazing in its hey day.

A massive area with 50 or so cabins and grassy spots for around 100 or so campers and motor homes.

We opted to park on the bitumen - less chance of getting bogged.

The grass was overgrown, the cabins were very run down, the pool was empty and growing shrubs in the middle of it - looked like the place had not been occupied for a very long time.

We found out later that it was a left over camp from the Soviet era – when the Soviets completely controlled their workers – across the road from the camp there were a couple of buildings – one a factory and one an office block of 4 levels with about 40 rooms/level.

Apparently the workers worked in the 2 buildings and the families were housed in the cabins.

The further east we have travelled the more evidence there still is of the remnants of the Soviet era – the drab bare grey concrete buildings and poor construction methods, atrocious roads and rusting relics in paddocks – farmers driving 40 year old tractors down the roads at 10km/hour – and Russian is either the first language or definitely the second.

We ventured into the small but quaint village only 200 metres away and found pretty much the same story.

A couple of kids on bikes, a stray dog and an old lady - the pizza place was closed on Mondays so no luck there.

We found out that the restaurant on the other side of the entry gates to the camp site was where you had to pay for camping.

We dropped in on the way back - walked right into the middle of a bikies meeting - about 30 bikies stopped their meeting and stared at us – they didn't say a word and neither did we - time to go for us!!! so we headed out the door at quite an alarming pace.

The camp site bordered on a national park, so after lunch we hiked off into the rolling hills and through the beautiful trees to the top of a very large hill. The view was breath taking. Still a sunny day but very cold - saw some horses and riders enjoying the countryside.

Headed down the hill back in time for dinner.

### Brezno - Slovakia

About 7km outside Brezno we found this amazingly beautiful farm - Sedliacky Dvor (web: [www.sedliackydvor.com](http://www.sedliackydvor.com)) - so vastly different to the last place we stayed.

We were met by chickens at the entry followed by sheep with new little babies and a goat or two.

Thought we were at the wrong place at first but were met by a lovely young man who spoke excellent English.

This place is first class with beautiful bathroom facilities, washing machine, camp kitchen, gardens and wi-fi - everything is so well maintained and the hosts Monique and Deon, were just delightful - for the first time we had other campers to talk to - both couples were Dutch (as were the owners).

They have a community library housing books and tourist information including walking tracks in the area.

The sun was still shining and with no rain in sight (has been two or three days now) we decided to take advantage of the weather (though still cold) and go exploring.

The track we selected took us by farm houses and chalets through the beautiful hills. Some parts of the track were quite steep and rugged and in some places, we had to cross little streams.

We came upon a small house on the side of a hill where we saw a woman about 40 metres up the hill at a sink washing dishes.

The house was some 5 metres away from where she was, but there she was washing dishes in the open countryside - strange sight to see.

We waved - she waved back and said something we could not understand - next thing her husband popped his head out of the house and spoke to us in German.

Now my German speaking husband driver, flew into gear and the next 15 minutes were spent talking about everything and nothing and they invited us to have coffee with them on our way back.

We dropped in about a half an hour later and headed up the hillside to a little three sided hut with table and chairs which overlooked the mountains and valleys below.

The dish washing tub was about 5 metres away - Simon and his wife Margareta made some traditional strong coffee and after an hour or so, opened up a bottle of champagne.

Margareta, was a Czech and spoke Czech only, and so Simon had to translate for her. She sat quietly and asked questions through Simon.

Simon (who was 68) had lived in the area all his life and he gave us his version of life in the area pre during and post Soviet rule – very interesting indeed.

As the afternoon moved on, it became quite cold on the hill in a hut exposed to the elements, so we said our good byes with hugs and photos and headed back to Ziggy on dusk.

The temperature tonight was predicted to be minus 6 degrees so we fired up the heater and sat and reflected on the wonderful day and people we had met.

### **Tatranska Lomnica near Vysoke Tatry - Slovakia**

As we travelled higher and higher into the mountains, we could see the snow capped mountains of the High Tatras.

There are 24 or so mountains here above 2500 metres - we arrived around lunchtime and settled in at the back of the Pension Slnečný Dom which is right in the heart of the village.

Only 4 spots here but again we were the only travellers - again a sunny day but can't say a "warm" sunny day.

After lunch we headed into the village to find out some information on what is still open here as we were hoping to take a chairlift or gondola up the mountain.

Sadly we found out all lifts are not open now - one might be open on the weekend - no guarantees - depends on the weather, she said.

We are only here for another night - no internet at this campsite so we dropped in for a local beer at the Pension where we are staying and then back to Ziggy for a quiet night.

### **Thursday 11th May 2017 - Tatranska Lomica near Vysoke Tatry, Slovakia**

Bought a pack of 40 eggs at the supermarket for around \$4 yesterday so had a feast of scrambled eggs with Uncle Mirek's home made Polish Sausage this morning.

Why 40 eggs you might ask? - because they came in a pack of 40 and were on special!!!

Not much of this sausage left now, have frozen this so should last a little while longer - we are really enjoying the different foods, even have my driver eating sauerkraut now.

Everything here is so cheap compared to Australia – have been buying 500ml stubbies of beer some as high as 10% or 12 % alcohol content for around \$0.60AUD for a single bottle buy – beautiful bottles of white wine for around \$4/bottle.

Spent the morning catching up on writing the blog - was 4 days behind so if left any longer this grey haired old lady would forget things.

Caught the bus almost at the front door to Stary Smokovec (beautiful little ski town) and from there took the cable car (funicular - cog wheel train) to Hrebienok.

Very touristy here and people everywhere - there are some beautiful walks from here through the forest and we so ventured on one that took us down a steep rocky track for about 45 minutes.

Came across some beautiful waterfalls and then trekked back to the top.

There is a magic palace made of ice here but didn't have time to see this as the last cable car was about to leave.

Headed home by cable car with some 100 school kids and then back to Ziggy by bus.

### **Haligovce - Slovakia**

**Goralsky Dvor** - Another beautiful place just waiting for the summer holidays to start - no other mobile homes here yet - a farm style holiday camp with sheep, goats, chickens and one very loud snorting pig- though he did quieten down when we gave him some fresh grass to eat.

They have cabins and caravans for hire and the bathroom facilities are great.

The site is located on a beautiful waterway (ideal for rafting and swimming in warmer months) and even have fire pits ready to go.

They have a beautiful country restaurant here decorated with old wares and statues of angels, animals, birds etc carved out of tree stumps - each timber chair in the restaurant has a face carved on the back of it.

First chance we have had to put out the tables and chairs for a long time - my best friend took advantage of the sunshine and took off his flanno shirt and exposed the chest to some much needed vitamin D - think the sunshine only lasted for about ten minutes before the chest had to go back into hibernation for the day.

We explored the property which didn't take long and then sat down and enjoyed the peaceful surroundings for the rest of the day - no exercise today.

Were going to have chicken on the BBQ for dinner but the storm clouds were brewing so decided to test the chef in the restaurant.

Had 4 x half litre beers, entree, main, sweets, 2 coffees and two vodka nips while the storm raged outside - cost a staggering \$25 in total - can't believe how little things cost in both Poland and Slovakia.

We checked our emails and received word from Barbara (my Niece) in Biala Podlaska that my Polish ID PESEL doc was ready to be picked up so now we are going back for a short visit before heading north to Scandanavia for Part II of our adventure.

## Poland

### Tarnow, Poland

Miserable day weather wise so was good to be travelling and we headed across the Slovakian/Polish border north and into Poland – once again no checks at the border.

Arrived at Camping Pod Jablonaimi. - not much to see here as it is still raining - lovely campsite set at the back of a hotel - again we are alone in the campsite.

Camping spots are set amongst apple trees on grass but given the amount of rain, decided to park on the bitumen. Very safe and secure here but a little expensive for what it is.

### Sandomierz - Poland

Wow!!! Blue skies with not a cloud in sight and the temperature inside Ziggy was a warm 15 degrees - we were in for a warm day (for a change).

We travelled through some amazing countryside, though now things were changing - the alpine chalets and pine trees were replaced by small towns with farm houses and acres and acres of fruit trees.

We had time to research a little before we headed off and selected Sandomierz because it had an “old town” and an underground and quite a lot of places of interest to explore.

Another one of those "hard to find spots" - just when the Sat Nav told you that you had reached your destination, you looked around and you were in the middle of new earthworks and new roads under construction - no campsite in view.

We saw the entrance only 50 metres away but there was no way to get to it without going down the wrong side of the highway.

Eventually we found a way around and arrived at the most amazing destination.

Situated between the river and just below the historic town, Camping Browarny again was so beautiful.

Set amongst beautiful lush green trees with birds chirping and everything was well maintained and with the sun shining and the temperature warm for a change, we put on some summer clothes and ventured through the back gate up the hill.

Eighty nine steps (not that we were counting) and then more hill to climb, we turned the corner and there we were in the middle of the square in historic Sandomierz.

Being a Sunday afternoon, the square was alive - people everywhere, restaurants and entertainment and the old historic buildings and churches to explore.

They had the changing of the guards every half hour which was a spectacle in itself. The guards were clad in full armour and were happy to pose for photos.

Every second person we saw were eating these amazing ice creams - all types and colours and they were enormous.

Had to have one, so dropped in to a shop just behind someone who was walking away with a soft serve chocolate and vanilla, ice cream standing about six inches above the cone.

I pointed and said "one like that please". Rob didn't want one as he was wanting a beer - but managed to eat half of mine anyway! I think it cost just over \$2 and was so thick and creamy.

We eventually rested in one of the cafes and sampled the local beer and of course some local Pierogis and watched the passing parade.

We returned just before dark and after a light dinner and some reading hit the hay.

Woke up Monday morning to another beautiful day - hoping this is the beginning of summer here - certainly has taken it's time coming.

For the first time we have other motor homes here, mostly Dutch people who all speak excellent English.

Enjoyed some conversation with them before we took the bikes off the rack (first time for six weeks) and hit the streets.

There are great bikeways here though they are not as long as we hoped -we followed the river as far as we could and came back through the local markets.

Streets and streets of stalls with clothes, shoes, handbags and fruit and veggies of course.

We bought some and then headed back home for lunch.

After lunch we headed back up the 89 steps (though we were not counting!) back to the square to explore the many heritage buildings - the square was not as exciting today as the locals had gone and were replaced with bus loads of school children.

Spent the rest of the afternoon there and headed back down the hill for the night.

## Kazimierz Dolny - Poland

Not a great looking day to begin with but in no time at all, the sun peeked through the heavy cloud cover and remained there for the rest of the day.

The 100 km trip was relatively easy with only a short part of it hair raising for the driver.

Seems that roadworks happen in the tightest of situations and when you are driving a bus (almost), can prove to be very difficult.

We travelled again through acres and acres of orchards, not sure what kind the trees were but expect they were predominantly Apple.

It was very sad to see so many old people in some very poor looking farming areas of the country.

We arrived at the old historic town of Kazimierz Dolny and soon found our camp for the night.

Strange my dad's name was Kazimierz and we have found a couple of towns with that name - will check with my niece Barbara in a couple of days as I can't find a translation for it.

Lovely little camp spot run by a husband and wife team (Grzegorz Pielak) who do not speak anything but Polish but we didn't take long to settle in.

It is right across the road from the river with a great bike track running forever along the riverfront. It only took about 15 minutes to get to the centre of town but again the town square was alive with tourists and bus loads of school kids - shouldn't they be in school?

There were lots of dust collectors on sale - souvenirs I mean! - restaurants everywhere.

Seems like every place that has an "old town" takes advantage of this and sets up mega restaurants everywhere.

Being on a river is an added attraction as there are several passenger carrying vessels (including one that could be included in a "pirate movie") sitting on the docks.

The village included an old castle and church and so many old but renovated buildings from the 14th century.

Back in our little bus, we settled down under the fruit trees and enjoyed the remainder of a warm spring day.

A tip - be sure to check the price of your campsite when you arrive (and pay when you arrive) - we took the rate in our "NKC Parkings" book to be gospel but found on checkout this was not the case.

Couldn't argue with the folks as they didn't speak any English so left feeling a little unhappy at the cost.



## Serniki, Poland

We travelled again through farms and orchards. So beautiful here, so lush and green.

Canola was growing everywhere - there were fields of yellow canola flowers mixed with fields of green - looked like a patchwork quilt.

We travelled over some very rough roads again, and reached our destination only to find the gates locked.

We are getting a little annoyed now because this has happened several times.

Our proposed destination was a resort in the middle of nowhere which was supposed to be open from 1 May but we found out from a local, they decided to delay their opening to 1 June - .....ugh!!! – signage would have been good as we drove a long way over very rough roads and then had to turn around and go back out the same way.

We travelled another 20-30 Kms to the next destination along some woeful roads.

Everything shook, rattled and rolled but we were happy to find Ranczo Arka open and again we were the only ones there.

A ranch turned zoo of some kind which has some very interesting and exotic animals and is open to the public at a small cost.

Only takes 4 motorhomes - they have emus, peacocks, ostrich, moose, kangaroos, naserbar, birds and of course the regular types of farm animals.

They also have a small lake which is the home to some beaver and swans.

It is quite busy during the day but very peaceful at night. Little animals run around at dusk including families of rabbits everywhere - very cute to watch.

Facilities not much to speak of but we didn't need these anyhow - No wi-fi.

## Biala Podlaska, Poland

We arrived back at Biala late Thursday evening and spent an enjoyable evening with my niece Barbara.

Friday we ventured back to Town Hall to collect my PESEL card (Polish ID Card).

With this card I can now travel freely within the Schengen zone as a Polish Citizen, without having to leave at any time and have full rights as a European Union Citizen.

By law, Australian citizens can only stay three months in the Schengen Zone and then have to exit for three months before being able to return.

Rob as my spouse can travel with me and remain in the Schengen under the same terms and conditions (we believe – yet to be confirmed).

We then filed my application for a passport which should be ready for collection within 2-4 weeks). We have now decided to continue our travels in the interim and then collect my passport at a later date.

This whole process has taken over 12 months beginning in Australia and then with the help of Barbara- five weeks later, after filing many documents in Poland, I have dual citizenship with my passport only a few weeks away.

This would not have been possible without Barbara and I can never thank her enough. This also now makes it easier for either of our daughters to get Polish Citizenship in the future.

The next two days were spent celebrating and once again seeing some more local attractions including Stadnina Koni, an Arabian horse farm only 30 Kms from Biala.

These horses are magnificent and the auctions held in mid August draw buyers from all over the world.

That evening we went out for a "thank you" dinner for Barbara and Piotr and after many vodkas and Black Russians, came home and laughed and talked until the wee hours (with the help of Mr Google, who has been our translator over the last few weeks).

Sadly we left on Monday morning, but we will be back one more time in the next few months,

### [Bialowieza Bison Forest, Poland](#)

With the help of Piotr and Barbara and their local knowledge, we set off on Monday morning and headed for Bialowieza Forest - this forest is one of Poland's most special primeval forests and has some of the largest and most beautiful trees in Europe.

On Monday afternoon, we were lucky enough to be able to take a 4 hour tour with an English Speaking Guide, Jerome, from Portugal and were also accompanied by a Dutch couple - it is very difficult to get on to a tour on the same day and sometimes you have to wait a couple of days before you can book one - very wise to book this on line before you come. Normally the tour requires 12 in the group but as we agreed to pay the extra, the four of us headed off as scheduled at 2pm.

The forest extends from Poland to Belarus with the majority of the forest in Belarus - we were lucky enough to go through some very restricted parts of the forest.

Just an amazing place, so beautiful, so quiet, so green and lots of singing birds.

Mosquitos were rampant but with the help of our mossie cream we were left relatively untouched.

We discovered a field of "bear garlic" or "wild garlic" - really pretty white flowers - this herb is used locally in salads and cooking.

We tasted the flower which tasted a little like horseradish with garlic - we will definitely look at growing this when we get home.

Tired after a really special and long day, we stayed in the Forest's car park for the night with another couple who were waiting for a phone call the next day confirming if they could get on a tour.

At dusk, we went for a walk around the lake where fishermen were trying to catch fish and then watched people head off on twilight tours with night binoculars.

This area is "Polish Bison" country and many of the tours include 4-6 day safaris to try to find them. Sadly we didn't see any on our tour but we have seen many man made statues of these everywhere in this area.

### Suwalki, Poland

Woke up after a great night's sleep only to find that when my feet hit the ground Ouch! - we did walk for 4 hours plus the walk around the lake yesterday didn't we? - we might take it a little easier today.

Quite a long drive to Suwalki today and found a great camp site called Eurocamping Osir.

We highly recommend this site as it is close to town and a great camp spot - cost was only 40zł which is around \$14. Beautiful everything - level large grassed spots with hedges between each spot, each with water and power (at extra cost if you want it).

The amenities block is just beautifully - new and clean.

Security lights everywhere and high fences surround the camping area with the gates being locked at 10pm - Wi-fi is excellent.

We set off to explore the town (by foot) and found a bikeway starting at the front gates which went for miles and miles around a beautiful man made lake and right through town - there is also a fantastic Aqua park here but for us a little too cold yet to consider.

Forgot to mention that in the last 5-6 days spring has sprung and we are now wearing those most missed shorts and short sleeve shirts we brought with us. - still cool at night though.

Hope the weather holds tomorrow as we are planning a long bike ride in the morning before we head off.

### Gierloz, Poland (aka "The Wolfs Lair (Wolfschanze) or Hitlers Bunker")

Set off after breakfast on our bikes to further explore this great little town - the bikeways are shared by both pedestrians and bikers but unlike back home, bikers have one lane and pedestrians have the other - much more civilised as there is no competition for space.

There are several beautiful parks in the centre of town and as we rode through them, we came across some kindy aged kids marching through the park - they had a long pink rope which they had to hold onto with one hand but they still managed to be able to wave to us with their other hand.

We tried to take a photo of this gorgeous sight but the teachers asked us not to - reminded us of Setinne and Eli (our grandkids) so stopped for a while to take this in.

Had a great ride around the man-made lake, parks and gardens, then town and back to Ziggy about two hours later.

Roads are getting busier now and we are seeing motor homes on the road - have only seen a handful over the last three months - the warmer weather is bringing them out.

We have been wanting company along the way, but soon we are sure we will be complaining about competing with them for parking spots.

Arrived at Gierloz and was greeted by guards at a security gate.

There were already 8 or so giant Tourist buses parked in the grounds.

We were directed to a motorhome area which we shared with about 5 motor homes and 8 bikers who were erecting tents.

We were a little amused because when they took off their helmets and leathers, they were just like us, old folk out on a group get together.

Thought we might have a sleepless night but they were so quiet we didn't even know they were there.

For a mere 40 Zl around \$14 you got to camp under a canopy of beautiful rain forest trees, have electricity and water and a huge bathroom facility (to be shared with the large numbers of tourists here during the day but very quiet after dark.

This price also includes admission for 2 to the Museum.

Groups of school children were everywhere - history is very important to Polish people and it is drummed into their children from a very early age.

There were no brochures available and when we went into the information centre, we were advised they were closed (in the middle of the day?!!!).

There was a very large map of the area so we took a photo of it and ventured out on our own. We won't go over everything here but if you want more info there are many websites under "wolf's lair", Poland" - one link is <http://www.thirdreichruins.com/wolfschanze.htm>

Bunker 13 is Hitler's bunker where a failed assassination attempt was made on his life by one of his top advisors.

Hidden under a canopy of forest trees and over many acres, we found old buildings and bunkers in ruins - very well camouflaged under the trees, they would have been impossible to see from the air - truly amazing to see the depth of the walls, some concrete walls would be nearly 3 metres thick.

The gates are locked at 8pm so we had a very peaceful night amongst the trees.

### Elblag - Poland

What's that noise? Woke up with a start! Just the phone ringing - so in a dazed stupor climbed down from the dizzy heights of the second floor and greeted the caller in a sleepy voice.

Hi Sis said my little brother, what are you doing still asleep at 8am in the morning. Only answer I could give is "benefits of being retired and loving it".

Good to hear from home at any time so after a lengthy conversation and a relaxed breakfast headed out of the forest and the Wolf's Lair to our next destination.

There was a U Boat museum only 19 Kms away so with the advice of the guard at the gates we headed in the direction he described.

Our first mistake for the day! the road got narrower and narrower (down to one lane wide) and bumpier and lumpier, and the fuel tank was looking a little low so after about 10km we decided to head back to civilisation and a fuel station as we had no idea where we were and what lay ahead in the direction we had been going.

Arrived in Ketrzyn about 20kms later, filled up with fuel and as time was getting on, headed for Elblag.

The sat nav was obviously sabotaged in the forest (spies I think) and went haywire - it did everything in its power to take us along the worst Polish roads we had been on - 70kms of potholes – some were so big you could take a holiday in there and in some places the road got down to not much more than one lane - really glad we filled up with fuel.

Got to say though, we went through some of the prettiest countryside - huge trees on both sides created an arch of foliage over the road for 30kms or so - being spring time the leaves were young and so green - shame my driver couldn't take the time to appreciate it.

By the time we arrived at Elblag, Rob was truly spent and sat and relaxed with a few beers for the rest of the day - no exploring today.

Think we may give up sightseeing in the countryside for a few days and head for Gdansk along the motorway, provided the sat nav behaves itself.

We stayed in Camping Elblag - great central camp spot and top class - very secure and safe and about 15 motor homes here - mostly German couples - brought out the BBQ and after a movie and a bottle of red wine - turned the phone off and slept soundly.

### Gdansk - Poland

There were heaps of roadworks on the new motorways so took us a little longer than expected to get to Gdansk - the countryside changed from farm houses and lush green paddocks to more sandy soils and more industrial and commercial buildings popping up everywhere - the towns were getting larger so we certainly knew we were heading for a tourist destination.

Another perfect day of sunshine when we arrived at Przy Wydmach campground - a beautifully set out campground amongst tall trees and spring flowers in full bloom - a massive campground with cabins and tons of room for everybody.

We had a bit of a heart start when we arrived and the gates were locked but within a minute or so they opened - reception staff spoke English and they were so helpful - so the rest was easy.

Then campsite was located about 20 minutes by tram from Gdansk Old Town and the trams ran every twenty minutes and for around \$4 each we had a 24 hour ticket to get on and off as many times as we wanted.

The campsite is also located about 150 metres from the beach (and the Baltic Sea) so that was a plus that we would explore later.

We followed the directions given to us and after crossing a bridge over the river Motlawa - there we were at the gates to Old Town.

Wow, Wow and double wow - we thought Old Town in Kraków was just the best but this place was more than special.

It was late Friday afternoon and the place was alive - the whole area of Old Town runs about six blocks in all directions - the old buildings were unbelievable - each at least three storeys high and everyone a different colour and each with statues carved into stone and some high above the roof lines - hundreds of gargoyles are featured in Długa Street (the Main Street) and all other streets.

Buskers were scattered all down Długa Street, from three piece rock groups to a string quartet, pan flutes and saxophones, clowns, snake men, painters - you name it - they were all there.

Both sides of Długa Street offered every kind of restaurant and food you could want.

In the middle of the street is Neptune's Fountain a favourite background for tourists to pose for photos.

We sat in a restaurant just opposite Neptune's Fountain and were entertained by people and buskers for hours while we had dinner.

Sadly there was also a gentlemen's club opposite and we watched the ladies trying to entice men into the club - quite amusing to watch.

We headed back to the tram stop after dinner and went to check out the beach before heading back to camp.

Although it was around 9pm it was still light for a short while and there were still some people on the beach.

Next day we set off again for Old Town as there was so much to see.

We walked along the riverside boardwalk where there were all sorts of water craft including rowers, speed boats, day cruise boats and of course a couple of pirate ships.

There were hundreds of restaurants and shops and of course the mandatory ice cream shops.

Today we spent more time exploring all the side-streets - so many wonderful buildings to see some including the Main Town Hall (built before the mid 16th century) .

The Crane (on the boardwalk of the Motława River - is the largest medieval port crane in Europe) and St Mary's Basilica (a Gothic building is the largest European church).

Mariacka Street (richly decorated tenement houses and famous for its Amber collections and paintings).

I was so lucky to receive a beautiful gift from Barbara and Piotr before leaving Białą Podlaską, which included an amber bracelet and necklace - it is so beautiful, I wanted to share it with everybody - thank you so much, it is really special.

We had heard about the new and controversial museum "the World War II Muzeum" and walked about fifteen minutes outside of Old Town to see it.

Like everything else we have tried to book in Poland, it is virtually impossible to get into some place special immediately.

We were told that we could get in in about 4 hours time, however we were already tired from all the walking - think we have worn out the tread on one pair of shoes already so decided to stay on in Gdansk for another day and see the Muzeum and we booked in for 10am Sunday.

Sunday was solely planned to see the Muzeum only as we had heard it can take several hours to see everything.

One of our prime reasons for this trip was to find out more about my parents lives during the war years as they refused to speak of it to us - I now understand why - those years were horrific and it is only now through some of the museums we have visited and the information given to us by my family here, that we understand how badly Polish people were treated during those years.

It took us 5 hours plus to go through the museum and we didn't see everything. Really worth visiting by all who are interested in the history of this era.

So much to see in Gdansk, we didn't have time to see everything but strongly recommend a visit of at least three days - we have really enjoyed our stay and will leave reluctantly.

The travel bug has really hit us now and we are really looking forward to getting to Scandanavia in the next few days.

### Mielno, Poland

It was a long but easy drive and Ziggy and her driver were very grateful for the smooth roads.

We selected Mielno because it was on the Baltic Sea - it is a town that has tried to become a tourist destination but has not made it - maybe when the summer holidays in July and August arrive, it may become alive but now not much is open - even the WC's in town (if you could call it that) were closed - couldn't even find one that you had to pay for, let alone one that was free.

The beach itself is really great and there are a couple of nice restaurants on the waterfront.

Camping Rodzinny itself was set at the back of a house and was quite okay, though I did not take to the owners at all - money hungry and everything was a problem - bathrooms were good, though the showers turned off about every minute which was an inconvenience.

Think we were a bit spoiled at Gdansk so we're not looking through rose coloured glasses here.

### Szczecin – Poland

Stayed in the camping spot at the Panorama Hotel just outside of town - very secure with security guards at the gates - very expensive at 70 Zl (\$25 approx) but had water and power included.



Arrived here as some of the blackest clouds and strangest cloud formations we have ever seen loomed overhead - just managed to park in time before the wind began howling and the storm hit - only lasted for a couple of hours and now we are back to full sunshine.

Only reason we stopped here is to stock up on everything in Poland before we go back to Germany tomorrow and then to Scandinavia.

Ziggy will be feeling unhappy with the extra load she has to carry but the driver and navigator will be happier at the lower cost.

Spent a peaceful afternoon writing the blog and doing some chores.

## Germany

### NeuBrandenberg - Germany

Before leaving Poland, we stocked up with supplies at Lidl and then Kaufland for some things Lidl does not have - finding it really difficult to find the range of herbs and spices we have back home (particularly hard when you can't read the labels).

The rough Polish roads have finally taken a toll on Ziggy. I guess this is the punishment for taking backroads to go through wee villages rather than zooming down motorways and not seeing anything but cars

We travelled on one section of about 70kms where every 2 metres there was a joint in the concrete but with no filler in the expansion cracks or if there was a filler it stood proud above the concrete causing quite a jar.

When we stopped we couldn't open some of the pantry sliding drawers – some of the screws had started to loosen just enough so the screw head would not allow the drawer to open – a couple of minutes work with a screwdriver and we were back in business.

Next time I went to start Ziggy – turned the key and nothing – and we were in the middle of nowhere – the Navigator was urging me to contact ADAC whom we have breakdown service with but as all the contact information was in another language thought I would lift the bonnet myself.

Well I must admit my knowledge of Fiat Turbo Diesels is extremely limited (zero) but thought it might be a dead short to the battery after all the bumps we had encountered

Found that we had a loose connection on the positive battery terminal – unfortunately this terminal post is the one right at the back and with my limited tool kit was not able to organise a proper repair so just wiggled a bit and we were under way

Found a battery supplier in the next town (he was trained in London and therefore had some English) who fixed the loose connection by replacing the clamp - two guys took nearly an hour to remove and then replace it - total cost 40 zł , around \$14 - unbelievable service and price.

All fixed and stocked up now we headed out of Poland and crossed the border into Germany.



Back to the land of wind turbines and solar panels and beautiful roads - this is to be expected as Germany is a very prosperous country and Poland while being a very beautiful country, does not have the funds to fix its minor roads.

We arrived at our Campsite - Yachthafen NeuBrandenberg - very late in the afternoon and opted to spend the rest of the day sorting out our shopping and finding places for the extras we bought - every nook and cranny was utilised, though we did find some extra room that we can fill before going into Denmark.

### Schwerin – Germany

Another beautiful day, so off we went on our bikes after brekky - this campsite is part of a yacht club and sports centre and the bikeway went along the waterfront and around some beautiful parks - headed back by 11am as this is checkout time at these campsites.

We travelled through the beautiful hills and valleys and thought at any moment Julie Andrews and the Vonn Trapp kids would appear over the hills and start singing for us.

A really fantastic drive along the motorway and both Ziggy and my driver were ever so happy - there were beautiful red poppies and purple and white flowers scattered along the side of the motorways for miles and miles - pretty as a picture.

We arrived at Sportbootzentrum Ziegelsee Schwerin. This is a marina and has about 10 waterfront spots. We were a little late and did not get any of these. The harbour master ushered us to a spot around the corner - ugh - view was of old boats on hard stands in different stages of disrepair - though we had glimpses of the sea.

We had heard what an excellent little town this was and as we were only 2kms away, we hopped on the bikes after a late lunch and rode into town central.

Beautiful cobbled streets and again a stunning Old Town with cathedrals and town halls and restored old buildings set around the town square.

The area is a "bike free" zone so we walked the bikes up and down the many streets in town - the city is surrounded by a lake and in the middle of the lake is a huge fountain. We rode around the lake and then headed uphill back to our camp.

Armed with a beer and wine, during our walk around the marina, we came across the first British registered Motorhome we had seen since we left Dunkirk - lovely couple who we shared an hour or so with before starting dinner.

Went to bed around 10pm and it was still light outside - the further north we go the longer the daylight lasts.

### Sehestedt – Germany

Because we had missed out on a prime waterfront spot the night before, we decided to head off early this morning around 7am.

Within a half hour we struck a traffic jam and slowly inched our way towards the motorway.

We saw in the distance, traffic at a complete standstill both ways on the motorway - we were not far from the entrance to the motorway when we saw several fire trucks

and then the partially burnt out carcass of a truck, now completely blocking both lanes of the motorway and fortunately on the other side of the motorway.

Our side was slow because everyone was gawking at the sight - the other side was complete chaos and for the next 20kms people were standing and out of their cars wondering if they were ever going to move.

We were rewarded because at Stellplatz Nord-Ostsee Kanal, we were able to secure one of only three waterfront spots left and within 15 minutes the place was fully booked out.

We are on a canal which in fact is a large vessel shipping lane - as we were parking Ziggy, a massive cruise ship followed by a huge container ship passed less than fifty metres from where we were parked - there was also a ferry right in front that continually took cars across to the other side - we watched the massive ships and other pleasure vessels pass by.

There is a bikeway that runs all along the waterfront to the next village, so we took advantage and off we went biking again.

Happily exhausted, we then sat and enjoyed our wonderful view - would be time soon to crack a bottle of vino and ponder on what a wonderful experience we have had so far.

## Denmark

### Fredericia - Denmark

New adventures and new country today - lots to learn about the rules and regulations of camping here - evidently motorhome parking is permitted pretty much anywhere as long as it is not near homes or in a "no parking" zone - you can park overnight as long as you don't "camp" there - it is classified as camping if you set up anything outside eg tables and chairs or put up your awning etc.

Border control guards were out in full force but we got the go ahead without any checking.

We are just inside our ninety day Schengen rule so am keen to see how we fare with my Polish citizenship once we exceed that time frame in a couple of weeks.

Camping is extremely expensive here compared to Poland and Germany but we have been led to believe it gets more expensive in Sweden and even more so in Norway.

Had our first taste of higher prices as we filled up with fuel just over the border (sadly missed the last fuel stop in Germany).

Pulled into a "free camp" located right on Fredericia harbour called "Svovlsyrekoj" - the harbour is a working harbour and there were cargo ships as far as you could see.

Being a Saturday the boardwalk on the harbour was filled with keen fishermen so we were entertained for ages.

Most of the fish caught were, we think, garfish - very long and skinny and very sharp looking pointed heads.

The fishermen were very careful handling these and hit them on the head as soon as they were caught - didn't look tasty at all and can only imagine they were full of bones.

We were parked amongst 5 other motor homes so felt very safe.

We set off for a short 2km walk to Fredericia central in search of a bank to load up with Danish kroner - shame that Denmark, Sweden and Norway do not use euros and while all are on kroner, each has its own individual currency.

We now have a stash of Aussie dollars, English Pounds, Euros, Polish Zloty and Danish Kroner.

We set off again after dinner and walked back to town to check out the night life - it was a Saturday night around 8.30pm and the town was empty - lucky if we saw a dozen people.

Came back to the harbour front around 10pm (still light outside) and sat and watched the view until dark.

### **Vejle - Denmark**

Did a bit of research last night as we noticed none of the service stations we passed offered LPG gas.

It appears there are only 4 fuel stations in the whole of Denmark that supply LPG.

Our first port of call was a servo in Middelfart - cost was 11.5 Kroner per litre with our exchange rate at 5 Kroner to 1 Aussie dollar that is over \$2 per litre - we payed around \$0.70 per litre in Poland.

Now fully laden with fuel, gas, food and alcohol, we Headed towards Billund (home of Lego).

### **Billund - Legoland Resort – Denmark**

Legoland Billund Resort is about one km north of Billund - cost is around \$65 per person (for seniors) and parking for the day is \$10 on top of that.

We found a park in the cargo area at the airport nearby (avoided designated parking at Legoland) and took a short 10 minute walk to Legoland. The place was packed as it was Sunday, and we believe tomorrow is a public holiday in Denmark (Constitution Day).

Though expensive for these two old retired folk, this is something we really wanted to see - and we were not disappointed as the photos will show - what a magic place – a bit like the theme parks on the Gold Coast - all inclusive price for the attractions and rides.

We did not do any rides but really enjoyed Miniland and the other mini displays of scenes of homes, castles, farms etc. from many European countries including harbours, ships, airports, trains - even had a whole section on Star Wars.

There was so much to see, there is no way I can describe everything we saw.

There have been over 65 million Lego bricks used so far to construct Legoland.

There is also a massive new Lego building in Billund currently under construction which will include so much more for the tourist to see here which is expected to be completed in 2017 but looked like it was a long way off completion yet.

We have found out that two hours before closing time, the rides close and then they open the gates to anyone at no cost - check the website for closing times and then arrive two hours before that.

Really glad we decided to visit Legland and after a short walk back to Ziggy, we headed to our next overnight stop in Vejle about 35 Kms away - a free camp offered by an auto camper dealer called Autocamp Centre – we didn't arrive until 7.30pm so had dinner, the regulation bottle of wine, good conversation and then some quiet reading until bed time.

### Gilleleje - Denmark

Bit of a nothing day today – we travelled for some time and then pulled into McDonalds around lunchtime (for an Internet lunch).

My production manager had a lot of photos to download before he could finish the next blog, so an hour or so later after a coffee frappe with ice cream and a mc chicken burger, he downloaded the next tall story for everyone to read and we then headed north.

We wanted to visit the Viking Museum in Roskilde but decided against it after reading a report from another blog writer who said it was a little disappointing and recommended another Viking Museum that was better to visit.

We then travelled on to Helsingor to see Kronborg Castle and the Maritime Museum.

We couldn't find our next camp site "Parking Nordhavnen" at the marina - we parked Ziggy and walked the streets and asked many people but no one could help us.

We phoned the number for the site but this went to message bank.

There is a very large car park (not the one we were looking for) at the marina but the parking inspector (who was booking many cars) could not help us.

He advised us against staying at the marina overnight as there were many break ins happening during the night so we decided to find a safer spot to park without having to pay a million dollars.

So glad we did as we found this magic spot called "Pudsagergard" in a little rural place called Gilleleje, which had beautiful manicured lawns, flowers and herb gardens and for 50 kroner or \$10 dollars you got a safe place to stay with water, electricity, toilet and shower.

It is about half an hour away from Helsingor but an easy trip in tomorrow morning to see the castle and museum.

Settled down with a couple of drinks with my driver (think he needed one or two) and enjoyed the tranquil setting until the light faded from the sky.

### Copenhagen - Denmark

Headed back to Helsingor and parked on the Marina where we had been the day before.

The parking attendant we met the day before had absolutely no idea about anything.

Firstly the place we were looking for was right here and he didn't know that.

He obviously is only employed to book people whose parking docket had expired.

Parking Nordhaven is really centrally located on the marina in the main car park .

There are double parks in the middle suitable for motor homes and for 50 DKK you can park overnight until 8am the next day.

Had there been other motor homes there, we would have been happy to stay there (safety in numbers) but there were none.

Though inconvenienced with finding another location, the end result was that we had found a magic place instead.

We took a day ticket for 50 DKK and headed to Kronborg castle a short 5 minute walk away.

Set on the headland and overlooking the sea between Denmark and Sweden, this castle was built early in the 16th century and has quite a history.

It was restored after being almost totally burnt out with only the chapel remaining in its original condition - the restoration includes furniture and paintings very close to the original works and some magnificent king's tapestries - a very impressive castle, though not as good as Schonbrunn Castle in Austria (our all time favourite).

We spent many hours there and opted not to visit the maritime museum as we had already climbed the 145 steps to the top of the tower of the castle and were tired.

Then off to the big smoke in Copenhagen only about an hour away.

We arrived at around 4pm and settled in at the marina named "Svanemollehavnen" for the rest of the afternoon with a front seat view across the harbour.

The marina has hundreds of boats and our motorhome park was right on the boardwalk overlooking these.

We booked an online "hop on and hop off" tourist pass for the next day, which entitled us to a total of 48 hours of being able to get on and off buses and boats wherever we wanted.

The marina is not centrally located to the city centre so we headed off with a 3km walk to "the Little Mermaid statue" in the harbour which was one of the stops where we could link with the bus tour.

From there we took three city double decker bus trips and one harbour cruise before thinking of heading home.

An unbelievable day where we had no time for a lunch break.

We saw so much but unfortunately we picked a dismal day to do this.

It had rained all night but looked promising when we set off in the morning - all I can say is that we were so pleased it did not rain on the 3km walk home as it had rained on and off all day.

Happy and warm in our little Ziggy bus, we settled in for the night and listened to the rain on the roof top, hoping for a better and warmer sunny day for our trip into Sweden tomorrow.

## Sweden

### Gothenberg - Sweden

The trip across the Oresund Bridge (The longest bridge on the planet) was just magic.

The first part, going through the really long tunnel was quite eerie.

Would not like to suffer from claustrophobia as it just went forever - certainly worth the toll cost to cross it. (I think around \$165 AUD.)

After paying the toll we were directed to the customs gate.

Ziggy smiled, I smiled and my best friend the driver smiled as the customs official looked at our passports and then said "have a good day" in his best English and waved us through.

The car behind was not as lucky as he headed for the inspection area.

We are hoping this will be the trend for all other border crossings, though we are a bit worried about getting into Norway as we think we may have one or two bottles of vodka, wine beer and other items too many :-).

There is no alcohol limit into Sweden but there is to Norway.

A long day travelling today as we are keen to get to Norway as quickly as possible.

Norway is one of the places we want to spend a lot of time in exploring the fiords and wilderness and has been on our bucket list for a long time now.

Not a very nice day with light rain during the day however we arrived in Gothenberg around 4pm and found a free park about 12kms from the city centre at Risholmsviken which is located on the harbour (though no direct harbour views).

The motorhome parking area is located overlooking the Volvo head office car park on one side and a minute walk on the other side to the harbour.

There is a beautiful view across the harbour with bike tracks stretching along the waterfront as far as you could see.

Tomorrow we thought, would be a good day to explore using the bikeways.

The rest of the day (daylight does not disappear from the sky until after 11pm) we sat and watched a group of young guys doing stunts on their motor bikes around the car park below.

Obviously they do this regularly as they were really good and quite entertaining - lots of riding on the back wheel only while doing stunts.

Think they left around 11pm and then all was quiet with only two other motorhomes here for the night.

## Lysekil - Sweden

Woke up to drizzle and cold again this morning so bikes stayed firmly planted on the racks ready for another fine day.

We left Gothenberg which is a very large port based town and headed into the countryside.

We passed huge industrial sites on the way out but soon the countryside changed back to lush green pastures and large forests of magnificent pine trees.

We arrived at a beautiful little harbour town called Lysekil which is one of the many tourist Swedish coastal towns.

Very expensive homes in traditional Swedish style architecture and heritage listed homes and restaurants dotted the harbour line and the surrounding hills.

On the way through town we had sighted another motorhome camp spot on the marina, but they were wall to wall and no view except for the restaurant in front - not for us so we moved on.

We had read some information about a special camping place from one of the blog sites we follow – we drove up and down the narrow back streets and then rounded a corner and there it was.

This is what it is all about - finding unique places.

There in front of us was a car park with magic harbour & ocean views.

Overnight parking is allowed in some of these areas.

No one else was there so we took up the front spot and sat in our dining room overlooking a ten star view.

Unique pale pink and tan rock formations bordered our spot and a small rowing club was set amongst the rock formations.

It was such a shame that we didn't have blue skies as this would have made it a twenty star view.

Took some photos in overcast conditions and hoped tomorrow would be a better day to retake these in better light.

Headed into town for a look around and admired some of the beautiful yachts at the marina.

Would be spectacular sailing in this harbour.

We then ventured over to the rowing club and climbed the hill behind it only to find another harbour tucked in between two hills with more sailing and motor boats.

The harbours edge was dotted with around forty or fifty beach shacks, all the same size and colour (Swedish rust red). Bit like Brighton in Melbourne but with a heap more atmosphere.

Never want to leave this place, it is just so beautiful.



We took a beer for my best friend and a rum for me and sat on the rocks and just admired the view.

### Tanumshede - Sweden

Woke up to rain again (sounds like a cracked record) and watched the walkers outside with five layers of clothing on battling the rain, wind and cold - no photos today (such a shame).

Reluctantly decided to move on while the weather was bad.

We passed through three other coastal tourist towns but being a Saturday, each town was too busy and there were no special spots to be found to stop.

We are now close to the Norwegian border and it looks like every man and his dog has come across to take advantage of the cheaper prices, particularly alcohol and cigarettes, in Sweden.

We are sighting so many motor homes now so will probably have to fight for good overnight spots for a while now.

We found the Vitlycke Museum or Bronze Age Museum in Tanumshede which has been placed on a heritage site where they have found rock carvings created about 8000 years ago.

The carvings are scattered over the hills beside the museum and of course are all long climbs uphill to find them.

The museum showcases the history of these people and at the back of the museum they have created a small town with huts and tools etc from that era - it is a sponsored museum and does not charge an entry fee.

No special place found tonight as it is getting late now however we found a park beside a church overlooking green fields just outside Tanum.

We are the only ones here and it is very quiet with only a few houses and some farms about.

### Stromstad – Sweden

Still raining this morning so opted to do some shopping at the Tanum shopping centre which is massive like so many in Sweden.

The major food outlet here is the Coop and it has everything you could wish for.

We really miss the Lidl supermarkets.

Lidl supermarkets may not have everything but because each shop is pretty much the same layout food shopping takes half the time.

Also took advantage of free wifi so my production manager found a quiet corner to download our photos and finish another blog while I did some more food shopping to stock up before Norway.

Rained all the way and we were happy to stop for the day.

All the streets in the centre of town were narrow and lots of new construction everywhere which caused our sat nav to have a minor coronary.



Finally we found a great spot right on the harbour again so put on our rain jackets and walked around the harbour foreshore and through town however being a Sunday, most places were closed except the odd restaurant.

Back to the harbour and after drying off settled down to watch the activities on the busy port harbour.

Several large passenger ships came and went and the ferry service using high speed catamarans left every 15 minutes or so. - expect they were going to Norway.

A little disappointed in Stromstad as it was nowhere as quaint and pretty as some of the other towns we have seen in Sweden.

Settled down to a small pre dinner drink of Kozel Beer out of a 1.5 litre bottle.

This is a Czech beer that Piotr had given us in Poland.

I had to help my best friend drink it and it really was a great tasting beer - not sure of the strength of it but it raised our spirits in the rainy weather.

We had to consume it before Norway as we were well and truly over the quota allowed to come into Norway. Thank you Piotr.

## Norway

### Son - Norway

Woke up early and checked for webbed feet - not yet but if the wet conditions last too much longer, nothing would surprise us.

Filled up with fuel and then headed for the border.

We were a bit apprehensive about whether our extra alcohol stock would be confiscated.

We were pleasantly surprised to see no barriers and no customs check point at all – it was just like driving down the highway so Ziggy smiled, my best friend smiled and I smiled as we headed for new adventures in a new country with a new language, customs, currency, road rules etc.

We are so taking for granted how lush and green and how beautiful the countryside is.

Everywhere we have been is just amazing - all the spring wild flowers in purples, pink and white are along the banks of the highway.

We passed over many high bridges and looked down to rivers dotted with stately country homes - can only imagine these homes are owned by the wealthy as they ramble on and on with stables and beautiful chestnut horses roaming in the paddocks.

We left the highway for Son which is a small town halfway between the border and Oslo and stopped in a car park high above the town overlooking once again some magnificent waterways.

This carpark provided 24 hour free parking.

We saw one of the cruise boats we had seen leaving the harbour in Stromstad and it was now heading back to Sweden.

The sun came out for the first time in weeks- don't think we saw the sun in Sweden at all.

Time to soak up the sunshine during lunch and then take a long walk to town for supplies and some Norwegian kroner and then around the beautiful harbour front.

Only 10 minutes walk down the hill into Son via a very narrow street (no way Ziggy could fit).

Centred around a marina, only a few shops, a museum, a Kiwi supermarket, a mini bank and restaurants and some houses high on the hill around a really pretty little town.

Discovered so much on the walk.

Thought this town was small but there are so many unbelievable houses tucked away up on the hills taking advantage of the magnificent view.

We also passed through some exquisite spa resorts on the waters edge.

Felt a bit like a "grotty Yachty" amongst these people who obviously are paying premium Norwegian prices for this luxury.

Resort Security didn't chase us away so we enjoyed our little time with the rich and famous before heading back to our own little nest on wheels.

On returning to Ziggy we were amazed to see a parking infringement (\$100AUD) notice on the windscreen.

We checked the parking notice at the entrance to the carpark and translated it again using Google translate and took a photo of it as well.

There was nothing on the notice to indicate what we had done wrong.

We phoned the number for Europark on the infringement notice and was told we had to phone between 10am and 2pm the next day to lodge a complaint.

Not very helpful at all - she told us that we could stay there as there would be no further fines for the next 24 hours.

She gave us no reason as to why we had received the infringement notice.

A little more than annoyed at the situation because earlier while we were having lunch , a Europark car had driven into the carpark and out again and didn't bother to speak to us or indicate there might be a problem - not very tourist friendly at all.

We settled down and tried to enjoy a fabulous wine and delightful chicken curry.

Climbed to the second floor at midnight to sleep but not before pulling the shades and to shut out the daylight.

Woke up at 2.30am and it was still daylight so expect that we have reached the end of dark nights and heading towards 24 hour daylight.

## Kongsberg - Norway

Drafted an email objecting to the infringement notice to send to the local town Kommune (community office) when we were next in a wifi area and hope they can help us with some answers.

The signage there was not adequate with information, particularly for foreign travellers and the Europark driver should at least have explained any issue to us earlier when he was in the carpark.

Headed for Oslo this morning with the intention of staying for a couple of days.

## Oslo - Norway

We passed through some major toll roads on the way to Oslo.

We were armed with a credit card but discovered these were automatic toll roads which means you can't stop at a booth and pay,.

Not sure how we are going to pay but as soon as we get some internet we will find out – seems like they send invoices for the tolls to our email address???

We headed to the marina which seemed to be the closest to the centre of Oslo.

We passed through some more toll roads but not really sure how many.

Can't ever remember seeing so many boats at a marina and such a huge place.

Literally hundreds of boats, probably a couple of thousand, and when we got to the motorhome section, there would have been over 250-300 spaces for motorhomes.

At \$50 a night, someone is making a lot of money.

We had tried to connect to the Internet at the marina (included in the \$50 fee) only to find it didn't work most of the time.

Went to see the harbour master about how to organise payment and to get some info on how to get to town and how to get Internet.

He didn't have any info, said we needed at least two buses to get there and went into great detail on how unsafe it was in central Oslo and to be very careful particularly with pick pockets (those nasty people from the East)

Long story short, we decided to give Oslo a miss and headed out of the marina.

We headed up the hill in Oslo to the ski jump at Holmenkollen and spent an hour or so there.

Spectacular views of Oslo was a bonus.

Tourist buses and a full carpark showed how popular this spot is.

Completed in 2010, this is the first ski jump made out of steel and has inbuilt wind protection.

You can also experience the ski jump through a simulator and for the more adventurous, you can take a ride down a zip line from the top. (Didn't take this option).

After lunch at the top, we headed out of Oslo and travelled west to where we really want to be - the Norwegian fiords and wilderness.

Arrived in Kongsberg late afternoon and parked beside the River Numedalslagen which has 3 waterfalls in the town itself.

We stayed at the Skiing and Mining Museum, in the centre of town.

The river splits this town in half and forms into rapids right at the bridge in town and beside this museum which was quite a spectacle and a mighty roar.

It was 4pm and the museum was still open until 5pm.

We asked permission to stay the night and then spent an hour looking through this amazing old building showcasing the history of mining in the area and also the history of ski equipment from its beginning.

### Kviteseid - Norway

Left mid morning after a very quiet and restful night.

We were able to connect into the museum wifi as guests so took advantage of this to catch up on emails and research.

Headed towards the Telemarkkanalen (the fairytale waterway) to see some of the lock systems in action.

First stop was at the beautiful little town of Ulefoss which offered a magic picnic spot on the waterway.

We have not found many spots that provide a park and picnic area so took advantage of this and sat in the sunshine admiring the view.

Today was one of the warmest we have had so far so through experience now, you have to stop and enjoy the sun while you can because there is a 90% chance you won't see it tomorrow.

We passed over some of the prettiest countryside seen so far with waterways, bridges, mountains and forests everywhere.

Just as we imagined it would be and the words "the fairytale waterway" is a perfect description of it.

Next we went to Vrangfoss locks and parks, the largest and most impressive flight of locks on the canal.

The five lock chambers raise or lower boats over a height differential of 23 metres.

We were lucky enough to arrive as one of the waterway tourist boats was lowered down the five stepped locks.

A very manual system where two young ladies (one on each side of the lock) used ratchets to open and close the large wooden gates allowing water in and out of the lock one level at a time.

They then ran down to the next level to begin again and then finally once the boat was out of the lock, rushed to their car and drove down to the next lock further down the line.

They were very fit young ladies.

Time to bed down for the day (no such thing to bed down for the night as there is no night).

Our Campsite is Garverigeden which is right on the waterway at the little township of Kviteseid.

Was just like looking into a mirror, the waterway reflected the hills and quaint Norwegian houses and the ducks and swans swam happily by us.

The mirror was only disturbed by the little ripples of the small sea creatures moving about below.

There are two other mobile homes here and this camp can take up to 10 mobile homes and we are surprised there are only two others camped here with us in such a beautiful place.

It has been difficult to find these places as so many towns have now excluded motorhomes from parking on the waterfronts.

There are many privately owned camp areas that charge exorbitant fees and are grotty and run down so expect these have put pressure on the local Kommunes to prevent free parking.

Sat outside in our chairs and enjoyed the tranquility (and a drink) until late in the evening.

This place is designated as a free camp ground so there is no problem with taking chairs and tables outside.

### Evadalen - Norway

Travelling again was really enjoyable as we passed through spectacular country side, just so beautiful at every corner.

We selected a great camp spot for the night and arrived there just before lunch. .

Honnevje Rastplass was located beside a river with mountains all round.

Great facilities were provided all overlooking the sparkling water and the little walking bridge across to the other side.

Some brave folk swam in the water but didn't stay in long.

The mountains here are sheer rock faces with little or no vegetation.

We are not far away from the ski fields now, so the countryside is beginning to reflect that.

The township of Valle was a short 2 km walk - all downhill.

After lunch, we took our backpacks and computers and walked down the hill and sat at a wifi hot spot for an hour or so and sent our parking ticket complaint to Son Kommune, did some research and then ventured back up the hill.

Rewarded ourselves with a drink (it was after all nearly 5pm).

Strangely all the motorhomes began leaving - we wondered why.

We checked our trusty campsite app and began translating some of the comments from past campers and found out that this site was changed not long ago to a rest place with no overnight parking permitted.

Didn't want another fine, nor did we want to travel having consumed alcohol so set about trying to find somewhere close by to stay.

Only a few Kms away we found a grassy spot by a bridge and a babbling (or raging brook) just off the road and at the turnoff to Evadarlen - this will do nicely we thought - so toasted the find and relaxed for the evening.

It poured all night, but loved the sound on the roof.

### **Bryne - Norway Friday 16th June 2017 -**

An amazing travel day today.

Ziggy climbed and climbed forever along some narrow windy roads that were barely wide enough for Ziggy - let alone other cars.

Had our heart in our hands worrying about cars coming from the other direction.

There were regular turnouts to allow for passing but there were times when we saw trucks reversing to a turnout to allow buses through.

We were lucky enough to travel directly behind a tourist bus so he led the way and we followed very closely behind which took a lot of pressure off us.

The scenery was more than spectacular as we passed by our first lot of snow roadside with still lots of snow on the mountains above us.

More mountains and valleys and lakes formed by the melting snow were at every corner.

We took heaps of photos but hard to find any that would do this scenery justice.

Sadly another mixed day of rain, overcast and the occasional 10 minutes or so when the sun came out.

Dog tired after a gruelling 100 Kms plus of these sort of roads, we were more than happy to stop for the day and perched at Abobil in Bryne.

No view, but a safe, quiet night amongst a fleet of mobile homes.

Took the time to look at a range of mobile homes that are not available in Australia. Very few of these cater for two people only and have so little dining and relaxing space.

Ziggy is so spacious and comfortable.

### **Lysefjord, Forsand, Norway - Saturday 17th June 2017 -**

The town of Bryne is quite large but just another town much like anywhere else.

We left mid morning after filling up with water - compliments of Abobil, a motorhome dealership in Bryne.

They were absolutely wonderful and helpful and nothing was too much trouble and they even provided electricity and grey and black water facilities at no charge.

Plan today was to find Pulpit Rock - one of the most visited spots in Norway.

Struck an unbelievable amount of roadworks along the way.

We started out looking for LPG gas before heading to these reasonably isolated places but drew a blank a few times which really ate into our day.

First stop, the gas pump did not work and was so antiquated that no one knew how to fix it.

Then in another town, there was a market next door and cars were parked in front of the gas outlet.

In frustration we abandoned the topping up of gas plan and headed toward Pulpit Rock.

Our 2 x 11 kg tanks of Autogas provides around 44 litres, which in the warmer weather should last us around 35-40 days, however when the weather is colder the time is considerably reduced as we run our gas heater on those nights.

Norway doesn't use Autogas for cars anymore and therefore the number of stations stocking the product are getting harder and harder to find so we need to plan ahead to avoid outages.

From what we can find out there is no Autogas in Finland at all so we will need to fill right up before crossing from Norway into Finland.

The trip again was slow with narrow winding roads, so took a long time to do a short distance.

We boarded a ferry for a short trip across Lysefjord to Forsand (around \$36 AUD) for a five minute trip.

A short ferry ride of around 5-10 minutes costs around 77NOK if your vehicle is under 6 metres long, however if it is 6.0 – 7 metres the price increases to around 197 NOK.

This price includes the driver and there is a further fee of 33 NOK for each additional passenger – so our trip was 230NOK

About 500m from the ferry is where we parked for the night.

The site allows for 5 motor homes only and we happily took spot 3. Spots 4 & 5 were taken within 10 minutes of us arriving - lucky us - we needed something good to happen today.

Parking Oanes our site for the night again is "to die for" with a beautiful grassed area leading to the Fjord's edge with views to homes on the other side which are scattered over the hills and behind them, mountains as far as you can see.

Relaxing with a book was the plan for this evening as we believe we have a challenging 4 hour return walk to Pulpit Rock with lots of rocks to climb over and a very steep climb.

We hope we do not have rain or high winds tomorrow otherwise will have to abandon this plan.

## Sand, Norway - Sunday 18th June 2017

Happy Birthday little brother Michael - will be thinking of you today.

Woke up to thick fog and drizzle - ugh! so decided to stay put until lunchtime at the latest to see if it would clear.

We don't seem to be having much luck with the weather.

Our Dutch neighbours said that the weather would clear by 2pm. Nope!!! - still more drizzle so off we went in disgust –

Pulpit Rock will never see the soles of our shoes or the terrified look on my best friend's face - he has a fear of heights and has been very apprehensive all last night about the climb today.

We set off in Ziggy and passed through a tunnel 4.8 kms long - and through many more after that.

The roads were a little better today and the scenery again was picture perfect (even though wet and overcast).

We will put in a serious request to the Man upstairs requesting some sunshine soon.

Waterfalls were cascading down steep rock faces into the Fjord's.

Mountains on both sides of the Fjord's wore tufts of cotton wool perched high on the mountain tops.

Ferries busily darted back and forth across the Fjord's to various islands.

Our journey today is to the little village of Sand, another one of the top places to see in Norway.

We needed to take another ferry across a Fjord and another \$36+ dollars were added to the credit card - ferries are a necessity here in the land of Fjord's.

Arrived around 5pm and Lady Luck was on our side as we took the last waterfront spot on the marina - front row seats again!!!

Our next door German neighbour had wiped out the side of his \$200k-\$250k motorhome on the narrow roads and was not too happy.

All the houses on the roadside and waterfront were white planked timber with red roofs, almost as if a caveat was placed on building design.

Sand is a town on the junction of Nedstrandfjorden and Hylsfjorden which creates a natural maelstrom for salmon though we didn't even sight the ones John West rejected.

Other travellers have been fortunate enough to watch this spectacle and even catch a salmon or two. Believe they visited in September though.

We took our umbrellas and did a quick walk around town and being Sunday, very little was open.



## Voss, Norway - Monday & Tuesday 19th-20th June 2017 -

Today was a brighter day with the occasional blue peeping through heavy dark clouds - though not for long.

We set off in Ziggy and saw sheep grazing in the green pastures and we even saw some sheep rock hopping through the mountain streams.

We were driving at levels where snow was still about but higher up and the melting snow created some absolutely thunderous waterfalls right beside the highway (death defying road).

The spray from the waterfalls drenching some tourists who ventured too close.

We took advantage of one of the very few places provided in Norway where you could actually stop and take a photo.

The scenery is so beautiful here but the only way we could capture it was through Ziggys windscreen which most times was wet. Some of our photos feature rain drops :-)

Many of the roads are cut in to the sides of the mountains and therefore there is solid rock on one side and a drop to the water on the other.

There aren't many roads in Norway and therefore they always carry a lot of traffic – roads that are supposed to be “major roads” are in fact single lane roads – I don't mean 1 lane in each direction, I mean 1 lane in total – so you need to be stopping all the time to move in to a turn out or reverse up in to the last turnout you passed so as the vehicle coming in the other direction can get passed you.

That is not so bad but when you come to blind corners it certainly gets the drivers attention as these roads carry some of the biggest trucks and semi-trailers I have ever seen because of all the road works under way.

The trip from Voss to Bergen is around 100kms and we must have spent nearly half that time in tunnels – some tunnels are good as they are wide and well lit, others are narrower but well lit, some are not lit at all and you don't realise that until you are in the tunnel – really scary.

When in a tunnel of any length satellite navigation is usually lost and some tunnels have roundabouts in them with 3 or 4 exits whilst still in the tunnel so you only get caught once not knowing which way to go as after that you check out the planned exit prior to entering the tunnel.

Throw in driving in pouring rain and it all makes for a very exhausted driver at the end of the day – not much better for the navigator as she is either looking at a rock wall whizzing past 1 foot away on 1 side or a drop to the water on the other.

We said very little for the hundred or so kms we travelled today both of us feeling the pressure of what was around every corner.

I remember back when our kids were small and we set off on a Sunday afternoon to have a picnic by a babbling brook.

The elusive babbling brook was rarely found, however here, around every corner there is the best spot you could ever find - only you can't stop to enjoy it – the roads

are so narrow and cut into such steep mountains that unfortunately there is nowhere to pull over to enjoy the scenery.

For the first time in our travels we came across an accident.

We came around one of those blind corners and found a Dutch motorhome off the bitumen with a front and back wheel in a ditch and leaning towards the mountain – no chance of getting back on the road without being towed out – fortunately no one was injured.

They had met a truck coming the other way and moved over too far to let it through and slipped off the edge – the truck kept going.

We offered assistance but they said that the towing service had already been phoned - we passed the tow truck a little further down the mountain.

We navigated through a section where major roadworks were taking place for around 10kms - one lane only at a time could get through.

We took time out and stopped for lunch in the car park at the ski resort of Roldal - not sure if we had much appetite after seeing the accident but the scenery looking across the snow capped mountains was spectacular.

The accident made us realise how easily these unfortunate things can happen.

We passed several motorhomes travelling in the opposite direction that had had their driver side mirrors wiped out – it is a common occurrence.

Didn't have much luck with our camp spot selected at Granvin as it too was a construction zone so travelled another 25kms to Voss to a little off road cafe which provides spots for motorhomes.

We are right on the fjord again and with views to the snow capped mountains.

### [Torvhuset/Kavli](#)

Our campsite is Torvhuset/Kavli a few kms out of town.

The end of one of the most stressful driving days we have had so far and really happy to sit back and enjoy the rest of the day.

It rained through the night but we were surprised to see a total blue sky above in the morning.

Didn't last long as within 15 minutes the black cloud came over and down came the rain.

We sat and read our emails and found out from some Aussie travellers who are in Norway and a couple of days behind us, that they have been waiting three days for the weather to change at Pulpit Rock so we are glad we didn't wait for the weather to change.

We headed off to Bergen today to do some sightseeing and travelled all the way through constant rain but the motorway was excellent (left yesterday's roads behind, thank goodness).

## Bergen

About 80% of the time we travelled through tunnels through the mountains (many in excess of 4kms long).

Most were well lit and wide enough but then we came across some really frightening ones with very little and in some cases, no light at all - very scary.

We arrived in Bergen around lunchtime and after scoring a park big enough for Ziggy, we filled up the parking meter with all the spare NOK we had and headed for Vetrelidsallmennynge and Mt Floyen.

It had stopped raining just before we arrived so we were hopeful of getting a couple hours of sightseeing in before Mother Nature decided to open up the heavens again.

Hard to describe, but this area is where the majority of boats leave and take tourists on every conceivable boat trip around the Fjord's that you could desire.

The harbour was full of massive cruise ships and judging by the number of tourists there, they were all in port eating and drinking and gobbling up all the trinkets you could want as souvenirs- including the Troll.

Set around a massive harbour and surrounded by hills, houses and apartments (true Norwegian style buildings) dotted the landscape for as far as you could see.

The town centre was pretty much one big mall with statues, fountains and interesting buildings.

Sadly, construction everywhere trying to renovate a town that is getting a bit tired.

Only the main streets on the harbour were beautiful - go back one or two streets and it was a very different story.

We were so lucky that for the two hours we were in town, it did not rain, however as soon as we got back to Ziggy (and happy there was no infringement notice on the windscreen) it bucketted down again and continued until we got back to Voss.

## Flam, Norway - Wednesday 21st June 2017 -

Weather was clearing though overcast - great highways today with wide roads for a change.

The tunnels we went through were amazing - one of them over 11kms - followed immediately by another over 5 kms long.

The scenery was spectacular as we travelled through lush green valleys with rapids and waterfalls bordering the road most of the way.

We had set the alarm to get up early as we were heading for Flam and hoped to take the Flam train on a magic trip through the fiords.

We had short bursts of sunlight so everything looked promising.

Flam is a major tourist town and when we arrived, a cruise ship was in port and at least 15 buses were in the car park.

Another destination which not only offers the best and most scenic train ride but also boat trips around Norway's longest Fjord Aurlandsfjorden.

We headed to the centre around 10.00 am and the tourist office to book the train trip but was told we couldn't get on a return trip today - surprise, surprise.

Decided to stay here until tomorrow so have booked the return train trip for tomorrow morning at 9.45 am which will bring us back here at lunchtime.

We are staying in town at the tourist park and have a spot on the top level overlooking the cruise terminal, Sognefjord and snow capped mountains all round.

This is the most expensive place we have stayed at so far costing around \$40, electricity and showers extra.

Took advantage of this and spent the rest of the day doing some much needed laundry (only \$20 for two loads) Internet and of course mingling with the cruise and train tourists in town.

There were literally hundreds of people everywhere spending up big.

With beers at \$16 a pop in the local tourist pub, we opted to come back to the park and enjoy one of the very few remaining Polish beers in Ziggy at \$0.70 a pop (while stocks last).

This park has around 100 spots and we were entertained watching people come in, set up tents, and settle in for the night.

#### **Fjaerland, Norway - Thursday 22nd June 2017 –**

Rained slightly through the night and was overcast and drizzling when the alarm went off at 7.00am.

Had invested \$90 each for the Flam train ride and we were feeling a little unhappy at weather conditions this morning.

We looked down to see so many tents being packed up in the rain and thought how lucky we were to be dry and warm.

This area attracts so many hikers and bikers who bring everything with them in backpacks and in saddlebags on their bikes.

It doesn't seem that long ago when we were in the same boat but on reflection was a hundred years ago (when we were young).

We had purchased a couple of new jackets yesterday so after breakfast decided to test these out and ventured down to the train station.

Another big cruise ship had replaced the one from yesterday so we knew we would be competing with the shipload of tourists for the best seats on the train.

The mountains were topped with cotton wool and the snow capped mountains around us blended in with the fog and mist and there was no definitive line between Earth and sky.

As the train departed, the rain stopped for a while and we were treated to some stunning scenery with waterfalls truly hard to describe.

The train was packed with Asians who were busily scurrying from one window to the next to get the best "selfie" photo at every opportunity.

Only one hour to the top at Laerdal and after a short interlude came back down the same way.

Although very short, the trip was unbelievable.

Returned around noon and quickly packed down and set off for the day.

Roads were the best yet and as the drizzle had slowed down considerably we made good time.

### **Laerdalstunnelen – the longest tunnel in the world**

We passed through Laerdalstunnelen, the longest tunnel in the world - a staggering 24.5 kms and at each 6km mark the tunnel is widened and the rock chambers are fitted with magnificent coloured lighting - just stunning to say the least.

Have fallen in love with this beautiful country (except for some of the roads and the fact that it is so expensive).

### **Boyabreen Glacier**

We have "wild camped" tonight and sit at the bottom of the Boyabreen Glacier in Fjaerland, in the Jostedalbreen National Park.

We have met some really lovely people here - mostly Dutch who seem to be travelling in Norway more than any other nationality.

We are in a place just before the national park information centre.

This would normally accommodate only 5 motorhomes but at last count there are around 10 with more driving by continuously trying to find a place for the night.

### **Oldedalen, Norway - Friday 23rd June 2017 -**

Same same but no different - drizzle drizzle and more drizzle.

Still amazing scenery though most of the time, heavy cloud, mist and rain hampered any opportunity to take photos - stunning in bad conditions, we can only imagine how beautiful if we were lucky enough to snag a sunny day.

Passing through Ulvik and around to Olden, there was a lookout roadside (very rare to find) where the scenery was more than spectacular.

### **Briksdal Glacier**

We drove to Briksdal Glacier from Olden but had absolutely no view of the glacier on arrival.

Time to chill out and find somewhere with some internet and wait out the rain (if possible).

### **Oldevatnet**

Our campsite Gryta sits on the Oldevatnet and boasts a rating of 9 out of 10 on the Campings App.

We are 5 metres from an icy green waterway with views of snow topped mountains, waterfalls and of course Briksdal Glacier (somewhere under the cloud cover).

We sat in our 10 star Ziggy bus and watched for the first opportunity to take a photo.

Internet is excellent here so my producer was able to download photos and catch up on editing and finalising another blog ready to post.

There are so many amazing things to do and see north of here so took the time to research and help with info for my driver for the next leg of our journey.

We have only seen one other motorhome with British number plates since we landed in France over 3 months ago???

### Stryn, Norway - Saturday 24th June 2017 -

Woke up to a patch (only a small one) of blue sky over Briksdal Glacier so rushed out to take some shots.

Just as well as less than 30 minutes later the dark clouds began to cover the mountain again.

Weather forecast said overcast only so took a chance and drove the fifteen minute trip up the mountain to view the glacier.

Once parked (50 NOK fee) we headed up the mountain - 3kms uphill pretty much all the way - or you could take the easy way out and catch a troll car for a sum of money.

Excellent track up and so many people opted to take the walk which was great to see.

We certainly needed the exercise as the rain had slowed down our exercise routine for quite a few days. Certainly not many bike riding opportunities here.

We passed by some stunning waterfalls only a few metres away and with a small breeze blowing, we could not escape getting a little wet from the spray.

Saw a small patch of blue sky occasionally so continued up hoping so much that the rain would stay away.

At every corner the view was getting better and we snapped happily just in case the weather changed and then 45 minutes later we were standing in awe right at the bottom of the glacier.

The beautiful pale blue of the ice was astonishing.

The lake of melted ice at the tongue of the glacier being the same astonishing blue colour.

We stood there for a while hoping for some blue sky but it didn't happen so we headed back down.

So happy we made the effort - it was so worth it.

We stopped at a Kiwi supermarket for some meat, fruit and veg - \$200 later and not a lot to show for it!!

We found a great wild camping spot on the fjord just a few kms past Stryn.

Decided not to continue any further today as the weather forecast for tomorrow looked very promising.

The plan was to get up really early and beat the tourists to the wonderful places we had planned to see tomorrow.

### Isfjorden, Norway - Sunday 25th June 2017 -

Sunshine - yeah!!!!!!

Headed off at 7am without any breakfast (first time we have done that) as we wanted to get going and worry about food later - we have so much to see today.

It is so amazing how good we felt to see some sunshine for a change - scenery takes on such a fresh look and feel about it.

### Geiranger Skywalk at Mt Dalsnibba

Our first stop was at Geiranger Skywalk at Mt. Dalsnibba.

This is one of the most talked about scenic tourist destinations in Norway with Europe's highest fjord view from a road.

The toll road Nibbevegen (130 NOK) takes a sharp turn off highway 63 and soon we were climbing steeply.

Lost count at the number of hairpin bends Ziggy negotiated and am sure she was happy to take a rest at the top.

The road up took us past snow a couple of feet deep on the roadside and past a frozen lake.

It is the highest viewing spot in Norway with snow capped mountains for as far as you could see and views down to Geirangerfjorden where we could see ships travelling on the waterways - a truly beautiful place and we had sunshine!

Next we stopped at Flydalsjuvet (juvet translated is canyon).

There are two viewing levels joined by a gangway.

This is one of the most popular photography points in Norway.

The view is of the beautiful tourist town of Geiranger way down in the valley nestled between mountains and fronting Geirangerfjorden and we can see a massive cruise ship in the harbour.

My driver took time out and sat in the captains chair overlooking this amazing view.

Next we arrived in Geiranger and watched ferries taking passengers off the cruise ship to shore and transporting them to the dozen or so coaches waiting for them - no doubt their destination would be Geiranger Skywalk.

### Trollstigen Mountain Road

We were now on the famous Trollstigen Mountain Road which led us to us to viewpoints including Geiranger Panorama.

Buses, mobile homes, cars, motor bikes took up every spot in the massive car park - tourists were everywhere.



A pathway led tourists through shops and then up to the viewing platforms one being at the top of a magnificent waterfall.

The view down the valley showed the famous Trollstigen Pass Road claimed on the Internet as being one of the worlds most dangerous roads.

Mostly one lane, the numerous hairpin bends and steep roads are navigated by buses, motor homes and cars by the thousands daily.

From here we watched huge buses navigate corners with little room to spare for themselves let alone another vehicle - very scary to watch.

We then ventured down this road ourselves - heart in hand.

My skilful driver and Ziggy took us to the bottom where I had a big sigh of relief.

What a truly wonderful two days we have been fortunate enough to experience.

Now settled in at our camp spot at Isfjorden (once again right on the Fjord) we look forward to hopefully a few more days of sunshine.

### Bud, Norway - Monday 26th June 2017 -

Heard the rain through the night so decided to have a lay in this morning.

Very bleak outside, but the weather forecast said it was going to be otherwise.

So ever hopeful for a change, we trundled off after a late breakfast and shower.

### The Atlantic Road

Not a lot on the agenda today, so slowly headed towards Bud on the West coast which is the beginning of the famous Atlantic Road.

Today, the weather continually changed from rain to a bright sunny day and then back to rain - a never changing story - the weather just did not know what it wanted to do.

Roads were excellent so a very peaceful and non stressful day was appreciated by my driver.

Still lots of tunnels, bridges and of course a short ferry ride.

Most of the road tolls in this part of Norway have been lifted but not ferries and at each ride another \$30 to \$40 is taken from the credit card.

They are the best option by far and we do not begrudge using this service as it saves so much time and fuel if you try to avoid them.

Bud is a quaint little fishing village and our spot on the marina is just delightful.

We look across at weathered waterfront homes, fishing co ops, restaurants and of course all sorts of fishing boats with seagulls swooping happily and many have made nests in the old waterfront sheds.

Visited the Bud Museum (Romsdalmuseet) and Ergan Coastal Fort.

Many of the bunkers constructed by the Germans in this mountain during WWII are still there overlooking the Atlantic Ocean.



Didn't get into the museum itself as it closed at 5pm before we arrived - we strolled about the hill and saw the many bunkers and underground tunnels built into the mountain.

We are sitting here and it is nearly 11pm and the sun is still shining.

Really hard to get used to so we will bring down the blackout shutters soon.

It is really hard to get to sleep when it is still daylight.

Love this little town, love this country, it really is so beautiful.

### [Vinjeera, Norway - Tuesday 27th June 2017 -](#)

Yep - guessed it, another mixed weather day. Tractor started its engines at 7.30 am right next to us and woke up all the motorhomes parked at the marina.

Guess it was going to be an early start today.

Did a big trip today starting with the Atlantic Road.

Scenery is very different to the Fjord's we have been seeing.

The Atlantic Road begins at Bud and finishes at Kristiansund, goes over eight bridges and connects several islands.

A parking bay at one of the largest bridges allows for photos to be taken towards the ocean on one side and on the other side, the beautiful mountains and Fjord's we had been experiencing over the last couple of weeks - a rainbow popped up while we were there - needless to say, it was overcast.

Just before Kristiansund we hit a toll tunnel (195 NOK later) and not long after a ferry from Kanestraum to Halså set us back another 295 NOK. total for the day around \$80.

Quite an expensive day so far.

Had lunch on the Halså side and watched the ferries (all three of them running simultaneously) take vehicles back and forth - believe this ferry service stops at midnight.

Too early to stop for the night and as it was raining, decided to get a little closer to Trondheim today.

### [Vinjeera](#)

Found this magic spot at a little village called Vinjeera right next to a restaurant that was closed for refurbishment - beautiful gardens and once again a magic view down Vinjefjorden.

There have been so many fantastic wild camping spots along the way.

### [Steinkjer, Norway - Wednesday 28th June 2017 -](#)

Hat on, sunnies on, sunscreen on and away we go - beautiful blue sky with no sign of the "R" word so won't mention it by name.

We have left the snow-capped mountains behind and are now down at sea level and heading a little east.

The roads are great now but after going through Trondheim, we hit a toll road and counted at least three tolls on the same highway E6.

There could have been more that we didn't see as they are all automatic - last count was NOK 170 but probably more.

The countryside takes on a new look with lush green fields for grazing and farmland.

Massive hay bales are dressed in white plastic and scattered over every field.

They look like giant size white pills.

From a long way away they look like sheep grazing in green paddocks.

Didn't stop in Trondheim as big towns mostly do not interest us.

Roadworks happening everywhere which gave our sat nav a few headaches.

Decided as it was such a glorious day, we would travel further today as we are keen to get to our final destination at Nord Kapp.

Travelled mostly through countryside that reminded us of Tasmania - mountains, green pastures and magnificent waterways.

Only difference being the rust red painted cottages with A line roofs and attics that dominated the landscape.

At least 80% of cottages in the country are either rust red or white which looks fabulous against the green backdrop.

We are camped at Paradisbukta, Steinkjer which is right on the beach and is a very popular spot for the locals who flocked to the beach all through the afternoon and until late.

Can't believe the locals are in summer gear and swimmers and are actually swimming.

It was 13 degrees this morning and we are in long sleeves and jumpers even though it is a beautiful sunny day.

### **Wild camp spot 37 kms south of Trofors - Thursday 29th June 2017 -**

Blue skies - nothing but blue skies. Not a cloud in the sky.

Travelled a long way today as there is nothing specific that we want to see in this area.

Acre after acre, mile after mile of majestic forests with towering Christmas trees on both sides of the road then down the mountainside to the rivers, nothing but magnificent forests bordering waterways so calm they were reflecting these trees - so beautiful and then these waterways turned into raging rapids as we go downhill.

Absolutely no toll roads or ferries to catch today so a very good day.

Truly beautiful drive ending up with a campsite beside that illusive babbling brook that was just magic.

Only one other motorhome shared this spot with us which is a spot that we have dreamed of often but never being able to find it in our travels in Australia.

It was so hot (first time we had felt the heat) that we had to put the awning down and sit in the shade for the afternoon.

Recharged the batteries (ours not Ziggys) and enjoyed a peaceful afternoon wrapped up in a novel that have been too busy or tired to finish.

### Polarsirkelsenteret - Arctic Circle - Norway Friday 30th June 2017 -

Totally recharged and ready to enjoy the third day in a row of sunshine, we again decided to take a long drive heading towards Nord Kapp.

Roadworks everywhere today and to subsidise these, automatic tolls were in place.

We can't understand why these tolls have to be charged to travel along roads that are not yet completed and very difficult and hard to negotiate.

Why not wait until the roads are completed and then charge for use of new roads?

We struggled for nearly 100 kms and think we went through at least three tolls until we reached our final destination for today - the rim of the Arctic circle.

We left the valleys with raging mountain streams and rapids and forests and began again to climb back to the high mountains.

Sitting in front of the Arctic Circle Centre surrounded again by snow capped mountains - "piebald" my driver said - exactly what they looked like with mountains of white snow patches over a dark background of green and black.

Very touristy as bus loads of tourists arrived and departed.

The Centre featured Norwegian Troll dolls at the front door and offered souvenirs for purchase and for the hungry tourist - a range of culinary delights.

We enjoyed use of wifi offered by The Centre and took the opportunity for my editor to finish another blog or two to post to the web.

Very quiet once visitors left and The Centre closed for the evening at 10pm with around 30 motorhomes camped there for the night.

### Saltstraumen, Norway - Saturday 1st July 2017 -

Overcast day though reasonably warm, we headed for Bodo and Saltstraumen.

More toll roads as we went over the Saltstraumen bridge.

Saltstraumen is a small town around 33 kms south of Bodo.

At every high tide, the world's largest maelstrom occurs and we wanted to be there to see it so we camped under the bridge, where although it states a fee of NOK 200 would be charged, we were told there was no charge when we went looking for a ticket machine - big surprise as everywhere you go here, it costs money!

We arrived at 3.30 pm and high tide was 6.05pm - only had 2.5 hours to wait.

Sat under the bridge and waited with around 50 + other people.

The maelstrom occurs as two waterways meet, each with two tides going in opposite directions with the best viewing time being at high tide.

Having spent a great deal of time on the water with boats we have owned, we found this more than a little disappointing, though to those not in the same boat, so to speak, it may have been interesting.

From our point of view, certainly not worth going to Bodo via Salstraumen unless the plan is to go over to Lofoten Islands by ferry.

Headed back to Ziggy and had a couple of stiff Vodkas to warm up before dinner.

### **Bodo, Norway - Sunday 2nd July 2017 -**

The weather was totally miserable with very little chance of changing, though the long range weather forecast suggested it would fine up by Thursday.

We had intended to take the ferry to Lofoten Islands so decided to give it another day to clear up so headed for Bodo about 33 kms away.

Dropped into the Tourist Centre in town and picked up some brochures about "must dos" in North Western Norway and then to find somewhere to camp for the night and read all about it.

Today, we went through at least four new toll roads that the sat nav did not pick up - ouch!!!

Each time the minimum cost for us as we are over 3.5 ton is around \$8 a time and I mean MINIMUM cost.

Headed up the hill to a place suggested by one of the blog sites we follow and after one more toll !! found the spot which had absolutely magnificent views across Vestfjordan on one side and the township of Bodo on the other.

This was the starting point for a hike to Keiserstein - the Emperors Pass.

There were two plateaus with the Lower being very busy as it was the starting point of some great hikes and the upper (where we camped) much quieter but better views.

We were joined by three other motorhomes during the afternoon and evening.

Around 11pm, there were patches of sun over the mountains way over in the distance, so took the opportunity to take a couple of photos and went to bed ever hopeful that tomorrow would be OK to travel on the ferry to Lofoten.

Coordinates for this site are 67.30118. 14.44281.

### **Ulvsvag, Norway - Monday 3rd July 2017 -**

The weather was worse than yesterday (if possible).

Put on the gum boots and parted the webbed feet and made an executive decision to bypass the ferry here and move further north until the weather cleared.

Forecast now says rain until Thursday so will take the long way round by road to Lofoten which should take a couple of days (no ferry a saving of over \$300-\$400).

Another four tolls at least today - becoming a little tired of all the toll roads in Norway- there is absolutely no way around them unless you travel hundreds of miles to get around them.

The government here really makes travellers pay a high price but the scenery is so unbelievably special - pay the price or don't come, we think is the attitude.

Travelled again through high mountains with snow and rivers and forests - just so beautiful but the rain slowed us down a bit so stopped around 2pm for a well deserved rest.

Have seen the Christmas trees in the forests, the snow on the mountains - all that is left is to see Santa Claus at the North Pole with his turbo jetted reindeers.

Have not sighted Rudolph and his friends as yet but have been told we will closer to Nord Kapp.

Nowhere special tonight - just outside this little town in a quiet wild camp spot with at last count at 9pm, 6 other motorhomes.

### **Svolvaer, Lofoten Islands, Norway - Tuesday 4th July 2017 -**

Woke to small patches of blue sky so painted a smile face on Ziggy, hit the accelerator and we were off!!

Decided to catch the ferry from Skutvik to Svolvaer - a two and a bit hour trip and half the price (Bodo to Lofoten was around \$350 for our size motorhome).

A tight squeeze with only inches to spare between all vehicles front, back and sides - was sure we would lose our mirrors it was so close.

Squeezed out of the drivers side door and went up the three levels to the top deck.

A very calm but cold day on the water and no rain which made the trip very enjoyable - though had to cuddle a lot to keep warm when on the deck.

Not much interesting to see as we crossed Vestfjorden until we reached Skrova Island where we went through a channel that was not much wider than the ferry and passed by a lighthouse that you could almost reach out and touch as we sailed by.

The village on Skrova was as pretty as a picture with homes spread along the hillsides and down to the waters edge - not much more than a little fishing village but really just wonderful.

A little while later we arrived at Svolvaer, a bustling town so different to Skrova.

We headed straight out of town to find a camp spot for the night a few kms away.

### **Austnestfjorden Rastplass**

Stayed at Austnestfjorden Rastplass, a popular tourist stop, which has a timber deck built leading to views of the fjord and mountains on one side and another set of 30 or so timber steps leading to another viewing platform on the other side.

Buses, cars and motorhomes came and went until around 6 pm and it was pretty quiet after that.

We were very lucky as the rain had held off for most of the day but as we settled in to sleep, it rained pretty much most of the night.

### Leknes, Lofoten Islands, Norway - Wednesday 5th July 2017 -

Weather: patches of blue sky with heavy cloud.

Decided to head to the most southern tip of Lofoten over the next few days so took the E10 and headed south to our first stop at Borg.

Everybody along the way has raved about the scenery in Lofoten and from what we saw yesterday and today - absolutely true.

So fantastically beautiful and with a little bit of sunshine occasionally, it was more than spectacular - the colours were just amazing.

### Lofotor Viking Museum

We visited the Lofotor Viking Museum along with coach loads of tourists, cars and motorhomes filling the enormous car park to capacity.

Peak season has only just started here and six out of every ten passenger cars are motorhomes and caravans.

We had hoped as we headed further north, the traffic would slow down but not so as it appears most are Norwegian plates and more seem to be heading south - thank goodness.

The Museum is a must to see as it covers acres and acres of land and has so much to offer in the all inclusive price.

Firstly the main building is the history museum with artefacts from the Viking era plus a great little film.

Then a short walk to a reconstructed Chieftains house which is massive (the largest in Europe we believe) and covers three large rooms with artefacts, decorations, crafts and Viking era costumed villagers ready to answer any questions you may have.

Next a twenty minute walk to the harbour where they have an authenticated reconstruction of a Viking ship which takes tourists for a sail in the harbour.

You can also try your skills at archery, axe throwing and horse riding for kids plus much more.

This is really well done and we thoroughly enjoyed the day.

Enough for one day so off to Leknes.

Our spot is set high on a hill overlooking the town, mountains and sea.

There is room for around 20 motorhomes here and at 9pm we have only 8 so should be a very quiet night.

### Nusfjord, Lofoten Islands, Norway - Thursday 6th July 2017

Weather: Cloudy mostly.

Travelled to the southern tip of Lofoten to a little fishing village called "A".

Never dreamed there would be a place called "A" but here it is, a complete fishing village at roads end.

Can't go any further south - the village is really unique with its rust red buildings or Rorbu which are houses the fishermen lived in while fishing for months in the summer months when cod came here to spawn.

The fishing industry is the richest in Norway (though we could say given the number of tourists here now - tourism would run a clear second).

The village has its own fishing museum, a cod liver oil factory, bakery (the cinnamon rolls are to die for - the aroma from the freshly baked cinnamon rolls from the bake house was like the Pied Piper luring all near and far to taste its wares) and many other buildings.

Spent a couple of hours there and is really worth a visit.

We then started back north with the view to going off the highway and explore every little road that runs off the E10.

So many beautiful little fishing villages here and the scenery never ceases to amaze us.

Truly wild, beautiful and captivating.

Just as well this is the age of digital photography as we are taking so many shots and each really does not do this country justice.

Finally our last road to explore was to Nusfjord where the fishing village here is one of the oldest in Norway.

It was so busy with coaches and people everywhere that we couldn't find a park so headed out of town and are staying in a wild camp a couple of kms away right on the water with mountains all round.

Might head in to visit early tomorrow when the crowds are not so huge.

Really can't believe how busy it is here - can't wait for the tourist season to finish so we don't have to compete for everything.

### **Svolvaer, Lofoten Islands, Norway - Friday 7 July 2017 -**

Weather: blue skies - no rain

Headed back to Nusfjord fishing village in the morning and was lucky enough to take the last space in the motorhome parking area.

Quite a bit smaller than A but just as unique with great walks in every direction - mostly up hill - where the views were spectacular again.

In the village they had drying racks for the cod and the smell was indescribable.

We actually went into the souvenir shop and had to leave as they were selling the dried cod in bags and the stench filled the room where there were clothes and other items for sale.

Suggest it would take a long time for the smell to get out of the clothes.

Lots of boats in the little harbour each trying to offer fishing trips for the keen angler.



We wanted a fishing trip as an option while in Norway but it is just too cold on land so think it may be way too cold out to sea.

Still in winter clothes, seems like there have been only a couple of days in the last four months where we have been able to wear shorts and short sleeves and then only for part of the day.

### Henningsvaer

Next port of call was the Vestfjorden waterfront town of Henningsvaer.

The side road off the highway was steep and windy and not much more than one lane.

So much traffic that we would have to stop at every 20 metres or so to move into a lay by to allow the traffic past.

The scenery was well worth the drive, but any other month than July would be better.

The road is shared by cyclists and walkers as well which adds to the frustration of getting to this town.

Henningsvaer is very touristy and has great waterfront cafes and shops.

We took a walk for about an hour from the main car park right around the point where beautifully restored Norwegian homes took up places on the hillside along the waterfront.

Had planned to stay in this car park as it was advertised in Campings as a free motorhome camp but they have placed a restriction of a six hour limit now.

Way too busy for us as we prefer quite places so headed out of town to find somewhere to sleep for the night.

Passed by quite a number of seaside villages with drying racks some still full of drying cod - did not want to camp near any of these.

Stayed again at Svolvær where we had stayed on Tuesday night - really busy here too and by 8pm there was no more spots available.

Had a lovely Swedish couple camped next to us - only very young and slept in a little station wagon.

Temperatures at night are in single figures now.

Think we can remember back a long time ago of doing something similar but not in temperatures less than 10 degrees C.

### Arstein, Lofoten Islands, Norway - Saturday 8 July 2017 -

Weather: very cloudy with the occasional small patch of blue.

We've had enough of the tourists already (we do not classify ourselves as tourists but long term travellers!) so decided to get off the main highway at the first opportunity and lay low until at least tomorrow afternoon.

Headed along the E10 until we got to Evenskjer and then peeled off on the 825.



So pleased we did as the road was super quiet and except for a small patch of a couple of kms, was excellent.

Ziggy hugged the mountain side most of the way with several smaller Fjord's almost lapping up beside the roadway - tranquil waters surrounded again by mountains, some snow topped.

Found a Vinmonopolet (bottle shop for wines and spirits) in Evenskjer and after checking with the bank manager, ventured in to check out the prices.

We are down to about two nips of rum and one bottle of wine left now.

The wine has been stored ready to consume and celebrate when we reach Nordkapp (North Cape).

Beer can be purchased in all supermarkets (except on Sunday's) but wines and spirits can only be purchased at a Vinmonopolet which is Government run and taxed at 25%.

Took out a mortgage and purchased a bottle of rum and 4 bottles of wine for \$83 - thought it would be much more expensive - might celebrate tonight!!!

We have camped at Arstein on the Gratangsfjord with a half dozen other motorhomes - all from Norway - a tranquil setting with no buses pulling in here tonight - hurray!!!!

#### Storslett, Norway - Sunday 9th July 2017 -

Weather: sunny - yeah!!!

Our Norwegian neighbours stayed up very late and were still chopping wood for their fire at 2am and it was still light outside.

We love sitting by a campfire at night but seems to be wasted having a fire in broad daylight.

After checking the weather forecast, because a bad weather & rain forecast was predicted for several days at Nordkapp starting Tuesday, we decided to finish our trekking around the islands and head to Nordkapp as quickly as possible.

Great day for travelling with clear blue skies so took advantage and did some happy snapping during the day.

Reluctantly headed back to the E6 - we were so spoiled yesterday with the best roads and no traffic and once again great scenery.

Nothing much to report today - decided to go as far as Storslett today and fill up with LPG there as it was the second last place in Norway that you could fill up before going to Finland when heading north.

Finland does not have any LPG stations at all so will have to get through Finland in 5 weeks maximum before going into Estonia.

We have worked out we use about a litre a day (when we don't need to run the heater at night and believe our tanks hold around 42 litres.

Arrived at LPG station - closed with a note advising relocation address - travelled back 6 kms to new address - back blocks of an airport only to find the autogas station pumps did not work.

This is so frustrating and would strongly suggest travellers phone ahead to check on supply.

Being a Sunday of course no one was around to help out.

Decided to camp for the night just the other side of Storslett and come back to service station tomorrow.

### Russenes, Norway - Monday 10th July 2017 -

Weather: Patches of blue sky with no sign of rain.

Blew like crazy during the night - was strange to feel Ziggy at 3.7 tonne, rocking - glad no one was watching as they may have thought the wrong thing (don't come a knocking if the van's a rocking) - solid as a rock is our Ziggy bus so there were no concerns.

First thing Monday morning we phoned the LPG Norge station in Alta to check if it was still operational as this was our last hope.

Yep all good was the reply, so ditched the idea of going back to Storslett and happily headed off to Alta.

Scenery is changing again now that we are heading back to the high snow country.

The stately beautiful green Christmas trees have been replaced with spindly shrubs and the backdrop now looks like a lunar landscape.

The mountains are snow-capped and waterfalls cascade down close to the road.

Streams filled with boulders become raging rapids from the melting snow.

We arrive at Alta and headed to the LPG station.

The sign on the bowser says "out of order"!!! - would you believe it.

I look at Rob's face and can see the frustration.

Calm, cool and collected, he heads to the office and a few minutes later he comes back with a huge smile on his face - the sign was put there to stop people from filling up and driving off.

We filled up and after doing some last minute shopping headed out of town to Russenes which would leave us just over 100kms to Nordkapp.

Winter holiday homes are scattered all over the mountains and some perched directly over the mountain streams - close enough to drop a line in - skidoos are parked ready and waiting for winter.

The local Norwegian natives (Sami's) sell their wares including reindeer skins and antlers from roadside stalls - some of their tepees look similar to those of the American Indians

The roads have been excellent but now are getting narrower as they skirt around the mountain sides and the tunnels are also becoming narrower and are a challenge.

The magic as we rounded Posangerfjorden - spectacular - brilliant blue seas forever and fishing villages and sail boats in the harbour all just unbelievably fantastic.

We rounded the corner and there in the middle of the highway stands an elk defiantly looking at us - unprepared to move for us - so we rewarded him with a photo and then moved around him.

### Vtre Svarttikka

We saw a few more elk on the hillside before we arrived at another spectacular spot called Vtre Svarttikka which only takes 8 motorhomes and again we were lucky enough to take prime position before the area filled up within an hour or so.

Have the iPod and speakers on playing some of our favourite music and enjoying the wine we were lucky enough to get a few days previously.

### Nordkapp (North Cape), Norway - Tuesday 11th July 2017 -

Set the alarm for 6am - eager to get an early start and beat the traffic.

There would be time, plenty of time for a leisurely breakfast at the top.

It had rained for most of the night and was very dull and cloudy so we checked the weather forecast which showed full sun for the day.

The road was fantastic and hugged the mountainside all the way up.

We saw several herds of reindeer grazing on the mountain side and some right next to the road.

Cruise ships could be seen heading along the fjord towards Nordkapp and soon we discovered they dropped off passengers to waiting buses to take the final climb to the top.

We counted at least 15 empty buses at a small town along the way - sure as eggs these would be travelling to the top sometime during the day.

We were rewarded for our early start and only passed one bus and one truck coming the other way.

The day was still cloudy and as we looked up towards Nordkapp, clouds obscured the top - no doubt there would be no view from up there.

10kms from the top we hit fog and crawled along at a snails pace - couldn't see 10ft in front of us.

The fee to park was 270 NOK per person for a 24 hour stay.

For us 540 NOK or around \$85 AUD and it was looking very much like we wouldn't see anything but fog.

The carpark was quite full with motorhomes and caravans still there from the night before- yesterday was a perfect day up here, so we were told.

We were lucky enough to get a front row position as a motorhome pulled out just as we arrived - only view was fog.

After breakfast we decided to explore the Nordkapp Centre (nothing else to do) and magically as we headed towards the Centre, the fog lifted a little and we had a short burst of sunshine with good visibility.

We quickly took happy snaps and then ventured into the Centre.

Overnight entry includes a film in their cinema, a museum, souvenir shop and lots of places to eat.

Half an hour later we exited the Centre and again the mountain was shrouded in fog.

Sad, sad, sad - the fog remained all day and despondent people who missed the earlier opportunity we had, sat in their vehicles praying for better conditions.

Loads of buses came and went all day.

We counted at least 17 buses at one stage - all these people now eating and drinking and buying very expensive souvenirs (nothing else to do).

Motorhomes around us slowly disappeared back down the mountain and not many replaced them.

Resigned to the fact, that we had our 30 minutes and that was all we would get, we sat and read and listened to the howling wind outside and felt Ziggy being buffeted about.

We watched people trying to walk along the headland with full winter gear on, being beaten about by the strong winds.

Decided to go back to the Centre and revisit the souvenir shop for a bargain (no such thing).

The fog was so bad we couldn't see the building at all.

Quick, quick Rob said as he pulled me out of the souvenir shop - the sun is shining and we can get some more shots.

It was after 5pm and for the first time today, there was not a cloud in the sky, no fog anywhere, and the sun was shining.

People appeared from everywhere (mostly from the Centre) and clambered for priority shots next to, beside, on or on top of, the Arctic Globe.

The Centre itself is an iconic building and the views from all three sides of the headland were much more than spectacular.

We had dinner and our special bottle of wine saved just for this occasion and then sat in the front seat of Ziggy and watched the midnight sun slowly head towards the horizon.

Took some happy shots just before midnight with setting sun in the background and an iPad showing the time to prove it.

We had ticked off another special item on our bucket list and finding the cold outside too much now decided to hit the hay.

It is like the United Nations up here – motorhomes with registration plates from all over Europe – everyone with the common goal of seeing the midnight sun, having a nice meal, something to drink and enjoying each other's company – why can't it be like this all the time – the world over.

## Finland

### Inari, Finland - Wednesday 12th July 2017 -

Set the alarm again for 6am to try to beat the traffic. A bright sunny day with just a few clouds about.

We had heard from a German couple at Nordkapp that the front gates and pay station are not manned between 1am and 8am and that if you arrive before 8am you can drive straight in - without payment.

They also said that no one checks your vehicles during the day.

We were not asked for tickets when we went in to see the film (worth seeing) nor did anyone come checking our dashboard for our ticket.

On the way down, about 5kms from the entrance gates, there is a parking spot which took quite a few motorhomes and this was full.

We found several other spots within about 20-40 kms - no doubt these travellers were all aware of the "come in before 8am scenario".

First part of the journey of about 100kms was backtracking from the day before and then onto new territory.

We again saw Santa's reindeer happily grazing in the hills on and close to the road.

They did not appear to be scared of people and cars but I guess that would have to be a requirement of Santa to become one of his team.

We hope to visit Santa at Santa Village in Finland over the next few days to put in orders and a letter for Setinne and Eli, our grandchildren, for Xmas.

Passed through the border into Finland without any hold up at all - straight through - no one to be seen anywhere.

Countryside in the north of Finland was a little disappointing as we have been terribly spoiled for the last month in particular in Lofoten Islands and Nordkapp.

Roads are much wider than Norway making travelling longer distances much easier.

Very marshy and muddy and after stopping at the border at an information board, where we were ravaged by mosquitos and marsh flies, decided not to stop anywhere some time soon until the terrain got a little drier.

We travelled around 375kms today so called it a day at around 3pm.

The camping spot we found just outside Inari, was the best by far that we had seen, and no mosquitos.

### **Santa's Village, Rovaniemi, Finland - Thursday 13th July 2017 -**

After two very long days, a well deserved sleep-in was needed and we surfaced around 9.30 am and slowly headed off.

The countryside changed back to the most beautiful Christmas trees lined along the road forever.

Though driving through light rain most of the time, we made good time and found a Lidl and felt like I had found a long lost and much loved friend.

Hadn't realised how expensive Norway was until we checked out the prices here.

Tomatoes were \$6+ in Norway but in Lidl around \$1.50 per kilo.

Only disappointment was that Lidl in Norway is not permitted to sell wine or spirits but had beer.

Alko is the only store that is licensed to sell wine and spirits and they are much cheaper than Norway.

Arrived in Santa's Village just after 5pm.

They provide free camping for motorhomes here.

Most things except some of the restaurants were closed so after a quick walk around to check out the lie of the land, headed back.

The car park is full of motorhomes so expect tomorrow morning will be busy.

### **Posio, Finland - Friday 14th July 2017 -**

The village is very unusual and seems a bit disjointed. There is no entry cost in the village itself but 2kms down the road Santa Park costs around €17.50 per person entry but for this you do get some rides etc.

The village is still under construction with lots not yet completed and what is there is mostly souvenir shops and restaurants and other shops that really have nothing to do with Santa.

### **North Pole Post Office & Santa's Village**

It does however have the official North Pole Post Office for Santa in Finland and this is where we happily paid €7.50 to have a personalised letter and postcard from Santa sent to our grandkids Setinne and Eli scheduled to arrive for Xmas.

Next we visited Santa in his house and sat with him for about 2 minutes and had photos taken.

Have to say he was the best Santa we have ever met and he speaks so many languages it is incredible.

Had a really enjoyable couple of minutes with him and then the elves led us back to front office where we could purchase A4 or A5 postcard size photos for €30 or a digital pack which includes all the photos plus the 2 minute video that you can download from the web for €40.

Ouch but given that we wanted to send these to our kids by email we went the digital option.

Only issue we have is that the photos are 11 MB each so need some good internet to download them - not sure where we are going to find some and not sure about the size of the video?

Next we thought we would leave Santa's Village and head to Santa Park to take some more photos of the snow cave with ice princess and elves but it began to bucket down with rain (surprise, surprise) so decided to move on.

It rained the whole of today making travel slow but the roads are excellent with very few towns along the way.

This part of Finland, Lappland, hosts only a very small part of the population so traffic is light.

Very few motorhomes seem to be in this part of the country and there are also very few places provided to camp along the way.

Another long day on the road.

Finally we found a rare camping spot set amongst beautiful pine trees and leading onto a large lake - not a person to be seen and nothing but nature around us (and the rain).

Had a fantastic and restful sleep (night before was extremely noisy with cars coming and going all night at Santa's Village).

#### Suomussalmi, Finland - Saturday 15th July 2017 -

Still finding it difficult to come to grips with the differences between the two countries.

Norway is brimming with motorhomes and tourists everywhere and the scenery is just magic whereas Finland is quiet with very little traffic and tourists and the scenery so different with mostly lakes and trees and trees and trees and more trees.

We woke up to a bit of sunshine which lasted about an hour and then the drizzle started again.

Everyone we have met cannot believe how wet the summer has been not just here but in most of Central Europe.

Broke up our trip today by visiting some of the small towns along the way.

We have not had a fine day in Finland so really missing having some exercise.

A little walking in drizzle has been the extent of it - not sure how long it has been since the bikes came off the bike rack but really itching to hit the road and get some of those muscles moving again.

We have again found a magic spot just outside of this town which is right on a lake with beautiful parkland all round.

When we arrived, we discovered that this venue was hosting a free rock concert for the afternoon so we watched the cars pile in and then heard the bands start up just over the hill.

If you can't beat them - join them, I say, so we put on our rain jackets and armed also with an umbrella, joined the small but wet crowds and listened to the bands.

Left after about an hour and walked into town.

The concert was still going strong when we got back but the security guards assured us they were finishing at 7pm.

It is now peaceful and quiet at 9pm and the sun has come out again for the second time today and there is blue sky everywhere.

Still can't get used to full sunshine and light for 24 hours - think we are really looking forward to a little darkness for part of the day.

### Nurmes, Finland Sunday 16th July 2017

Woke up to one of those absolutely perfect days. Full sun, blue skies and not a cloud in sight and temp being a cool 16 degrees.

Straight after breakfast, took the bikes off the racks and headed to the bike trail only a few metres away.

The path took us through the forest along gravel paths which was a little hard going, particularly up hill.

I took the easy way out and used my power pack to get up the hills but Rob used his man power only.

Stopped to take some unbelievable camera shots of lakes we passed by.

So serene with no breeze at all, the lakes mirrored the tall trees and blue skies and colourful rock faces - came back the same way and then biked into town.

So good to be able to exercise again and thoroughly enjoyed the hour or so before heading off again.

Decided to make today a small drive and take advantage of the beautiful day at the other end so drove to Nurmes and again found a great spot on a quiet little marina just outside of town.

Straight onto the bikes again and headed around the lake and then to town.

Uphill all the way to town, but a good even track so decided to give the power pack a miss and push the muscles.

Very quiet in town as most places are closed on Sunday - a joy coming back as it was pretty much downhill all the way.

The marina was very busy with cars coming and going all afternoon.

Fishing boats and pleasure craft out enjoying this rare day.

There was a small park and beach on the other side of the marina and families were enjoying picnics and some (very brave) people were actually swimming.

Took advantage of the sunlight and did some much needed washing as Rob gave Ziggy a much needed wash down.



All chores done and dusted, settled down to a couple of drinks and watched the sun go over the hill and listened to some music before bed (still light all night).

### Varkaus, Finland - Monday 17th July 2017 -

Finland is made up of over 70% forests and has over 1,000 lakes so the countryside does not change much.

The population is just over 5 million and most of the population lives in the south.

They do not cater well for travellers with only one registered service point in the whole country that provides water and black and grey water disposal areas.

95% of the roadside parking areas do not have WC's. There are some (but not many) camping places and these are very expensive to stay at.

We have been very creative in finding water and have found marinas and cemeteries and sometimes churches are a good chance.

Today was a typical day being overcast and cloudy and rain along the way and not a lot of interesting or different scenery, though the forests are very lush and green.

It is quite funny seeing roadside signs saying beware of elk where at home they are kangaroos.

We have seen so many elk and reindeer along the roadside grazing and they love running along the roads and won't get off even when you beep the horn.

It is quite funny to watch a herd of reindeer waddle along in front of you on a two lane highway and making no effort to get off - we have sometimes followed them for half a km or so.

We are back to the wild flowers on both sides of the road - purple, pink and white which look like a smaller version of our "stocks" back home.

Very colourful and with these comes the feeling that we have almost caught up to summer again in Scandinavia.

The sun is now setting below the horizon but the sky still retains some light for most of the night.

We are back to short sleeves and shorts for a short time during the day but nights are still around the 16 degrees.

We turned off the road just before the town of Varkaus as we could not find anywhere suitable and quiet along the highway.

Saw a sign to a boat ramp so headed that way and found a fantastic spot right on the waterfront - space for Ziggy alone with no room for anyone else - what a shame :-)

We watched as some locals came and went in their fishing boats or walked their dogs but from 5pm all was quiet - just the fish and the birds and us to enjoy this beautiful setting.

### Heinola, Finland - Tuesday 18th July 2017,

Another rare sunny day so our aim today was to get as close to Helsinki as possible so we could drive in to the city centre at a reasonable hour the next day.

It has been so refreshing in Finland to travel without road tolls and ferries which made the cost in Norway very expensive.

The speed allowed in some places on the motorway was 120kms per hour and the roads were excellent but with that came lots of speed cameras along the road.

Each time the speed was reduced to 80 in a built up area there was a speed camera there to capture the driver who wasn't paying attention.

Again no luck with finding an easy spot for the night so we Turned off at Heinola which left us just over a 100kms to Helsinki.

We parked at the jetty next to a waterfront cafe and decided to have lunch there.

We enjoyed lunch and a pint and watched the boats and people go by.

The cafe sold ice creams and it was amazing to see how many different ways people and kids devour ice creams.

We drove around the town looking for the perfect spot.

What a pretty town - avenues lined with trees and neat little and large homes.

This town is the last one on the map that is lake front with lots of marinas and waterfront but nothing suitable for us.

We found a spot right next to where we had lunch with unrestricted parking and then walked into town.

Spent a couple of hours walking and viewing the wares in the marketplace before heading back for the night.

Was not the quietest spot as we had a couple of noisy cars whose drivers thought they were rally drivers and did some burnouts on the street nearby.

We have found that people here come out at all times of the night as it never gets dark - can imagine we would be the same after having a couple of months of no daylight.

### **Helsinki, Finland - Wednesday 19th - Saturday 22nd July 2017 -**

There is a dedicated motorhome spot right on the harbour at Helsinki Zoo.

When we arrived the attendant told us the spots were all full so we moved on and decided to come back late afternoon when the zoo was closing.

We found a spot nearby and parked and did some research on sights to see in Helsinki and Estonia.

Returned at 5pm and had our pick of the 10 motorhome spots available.

Put on our walking shoes and headed up to the zoo which closed at 6pm.

There were 3 tiers of parking and then overflow parking at a sports centre on the tennis courts next door.

Being holiday season, the carpark was full and we passed streams of people leaving the zoo which is actually on an island with a bridge across to it.

For the adventurous, there is a high wire zip line and jungle above ground activity park just before the zoo.

Set high above the ground, you go from tree to tree doing various activities - might give that one a miss but really well done and lots of people swinging and zipping above us through the trees.

The No 16 bus is right at the entrance to the car park and runs every 20 minutes straight into the centre of Helsinki to Central Station.

There is also a ferry that runs from the Zoo into Market Square.

Again an overcast day so we took a backpack each with rain gear, water, iPads and eager with anticipation of what lay ahead for the day, bought a 24 hour ticket for €9 and headed into town.

The bus driver was excellent and dropped us off at the Tourist Office located inside Central Station.

Best tourist office we have been to - as soon as we arrived, we were greeted by a tourist officer who took us step by step on our map of "must sees" in Helsinki.

Unbelievably helpful and definitely a big tick for Helsinki.

She also gave us a book of Discount Coupons each which gave us free entry into various attractions and of course discounts on tours and food etc.

Our bus ticket also included a free public ferry ride to Soumenlinna Island - our first destination for the day.

A really great 20 minute ferry ride in the harbour took us past several small one house islands - very extravagant, your own private island.

Huge ferries in the harbour ready to take man and car to lots of different countries - one which will take us to Tallinn, Estonia in a few days time.

We arrived at the Sea Fortress on Soumenlinna - construction began in the 18th century and with the other 100+ people on this ferry toured the island and then spent several hours going through museums and submarines, arts and crafts etc - the fortifications and old garrison buildings have been restored and converted into residential properties, studios and offices restaurants and museums.

Tickets in our voucher books gave us free entry into some of these.

It started to rain, so decided to go back to Market square and explore the many other attractions in town.

As the ferry docked at Market Square, the people waiting to board were back as far as you could see - heaps more than were on our ferry two hours earlier.

Market Square was crowded to capacity with the many eating halls unable to cope with the crowds.

As it was raining people were clambering to get under shelter.

Stalls selling food, souvenirs and fresh berries of all kinds covered the massive square which was also the terminal for the many sightseeing ferries and boats departing to their respective destinations.

We had thought of picking up some Finnish delights at Market Square but opted to get away from the tourists and headed into a quieter area where we had lunch and waited for the rain to clear.

Next off to Helsinki Cathedral and Senate Square.

The all white cathedral is an icon and stands high above the town.

Fifty steps up from Senate Square to the cathedral then the view over Senate Square and town was spectacular.

The outside of the building is stunning but inside it is quite bare except for the cathedral organ which was the only impressive part.

The city was a buzz with tourists and whilst it does not have an Old Town, many of the buildings were unique.

Uspenski Cathedral is another city landmark - a massive red building with stunning gold domes on each tower set high on a hill with so many steps, we lost count.

The streets were lined with cafes and restaurants and a shopping area that was specifically for the rich and famous - designer labels in every shopfront - only customers we saw were Asian and they had several bags each.

We sat in an open air concert area where bands played for the diners in the several tree lined cafes – a truly very busy city centre.

We arrived back at Ziggy around 5pm thoroughly exhausted but on a high from such a great day.

Surprise, surprise - right beside Ziggy was another motorhome with Australian stickers all over it - first we had seen in over four and a half months.

Phil and Mads were from the Northern Territory and had been travelling overseas over a period of 5 years - though they often leave their motorhome in Europe and head back home for a few months to catch up with kids and grandkids and friends and then head back here to resume their journey.

We sat on the dock of Helsinki bay and told stories for hours.

So great to hear an Aussie voice again and we really enjoyed their company.

They were heading north to Iceland in the morning and it was sad we could not spend more time as they had a wealth of experience to share with us.

The following morning was a beautiful sunny day and after breakfast we bid Phil and Mads goodbye and then sat and booked our passage to Estonia.

We could not get on a ferry today without having to see the bank manager first and the earliest we could get a reasonably priced ticket was tomorrow departing at 3:15pm.

Today was a "time out - do nothing day" so after doing some chores - debugging Ziggy's bonnet from the millions of insects we had gathered over a few months, we grabbed our chairs and sat on the dock, in the sun, doing nothing but talking and enjoying the fabulous day and eventually having a beverage or two.

There is a little cafe at the end of the dock and boats were coming and going all day, mooring and enjoying the sunshine on its deck.

Families parking and heading to the zoo and afterwards coming to the dock to feed the ducks and seagulls and fishermen trying their luck - didn't see anything being caught.

A wonderful peaceful day and now batteries fully recharged looking forward to another country and new adventures in Estonia from tomorrow.

## Estonia

### Tallinn, Estonia - Saturday 22nd, Sunday 23rd July 2017 -

As the Helsinki Zoo car park fills up very quickly we opted to leave around 9.30 am so that we would not get parked in.

Car parks are quite narrow here with not a lot of room to manoeuvre if cars are parked opposite.

We headed straight to the Eckero Cruise terminal.

The MS Finnlandia was not set to sail until 3.15 pm however check in was requested for 2 hours earlier.

Quite relaxing sitting at the terminal watching other ships loading in the comfort of our 5 star accommodation and soon it was our turn to join the line.

All the car ferry/ships are massive and set up like other cruise ships with shops, casinos in every spare corner and a multitude of choices of places to eat and drink.

Even had on board entertainment though the trip was just over two hours.

We sat on the top deck in the sun overlooking the sea and took advantage of the wifi to do some more work on our blog - a perfect sunny day with little or no wind and so was just wonderful.

Docked around 5.30pm and soon were settled into our overnight camp at the Port of Tallinn - just around the corner.

The location, though a mixed parking area only, was perfectly situated right beside the heart of the city - only a 5-10 minute walk to Central and Old Town.

Passengers for the cruise ships came and went and the area was alive.

We headed off on foot to do some preliminary exploring and found a magic spot in the Rotermann Quarter to have dinner.

Situated next to Old Town, it is an old factory complex turned into a commercial centre with avant-garde architecture.

The little stone walkways threading through narrow alleys with restaurants on either side.

Fairy lights across the cobblestone alleys would be spectacular (if we had night but it is still light right up to midnight).

We returned to Ziggy at around 8.30 pm really tired after hours of walking and decided to move Ziggy to another position to get better internet reception.

We had not even had time to turn the engine off when we were approached by a lady (another Aussie) who had seen the Aussie flag on Ziggy.

After a few minutes Allison and hubby Alan invited us to have a wine with them in their motorhome a few doors up.

We sat and talked and talked and talked until after 1 am (we had no idea it was that late).

They have been travelling in Europe for 7 years and have no immediate plans for returning home any time soon.

They were not leaving for Finland until Monday so we made plans to meet again Sunday afternoon for a few more wines and dinner somewhere in Old Town.

We toured for nearly 5 months before seeing any Aussies in a motorhome and then we saw 2 couples in 2 days – Phil and Mads in Helsinki who have been touring Europe for 5 years and now Allison and Alan who have been touring Europe for seven years – made us feel like newbies.

Bright and early, we set off for Old Town - a real Jewel.

Twisting cobblestone lanes and iron street lamps, Gothic spires and medieval markets.

This enclosed neighbourhood of colourful, gabled houses, half hidden courtyards and grandiose churches is Tallinn's greatest attraction.

It took us literally hours to walk up and down the narrow courtyards and through the multitude of shops and museums and churches, at times stopping to listen to the lone guitarist or three piece orchestra.

The restaurants in market square packed with tourists who sat people watching as vendors in traditional and medieval costumes sold their wares from the markets.

We were just one of those tourists who did exactly the same.

The area is massive and covers several blocks - by far the largest we have seen so far with so many beautiful old buildings.

We left Old Town and passed through some beautiful flower markets and the perfumes and colours were astonishing.

We walked through parks and gardens and street after street of restaurants and finally back to the Port for a well deserved rest before our reciprocal with Allison and Alan which no doubt would linger longer again.

We started at our motorhome at around 5pm and after about 3 bottles of wine and some excellent conversation and much laughter, headed back to Old Town for dinner where we found a great little restaurant (so many to choose from) and finally got kicked out when the restaurant closed.

## Lahemaa National Park, Estonia (Oandu Village) - Monday 24th July 2017 -

Waved our goodbyes with the promise to keep in touch with Allison and Alan - they headed to Finland on the ferry we came across on and we continued our journey to eastern Estonia.

The supermarket at the port housed one of the biggest bottle shops we have seen anywhere and judging by the prices, we were back to the land of plenty at not much cost.

The supermarket (while only small) displayed some interesting varieties of Estonian foods and prices were back to what we would call better than home (but not as good as Poland).

We looked for the nearest Lidl to stock up after Scandinavia but it appears from the web there are none as yet in Estonia but they have plans to open some soon - what a disappointment.

Tallinn itself is very modern but once out of town, the Soviet influences took over quickly.

Lots of old grey buildings in many cases dilapidated and unit complexes three to five storeys high, rectangular with small windows and no balconies, spread out over whole blocks took over the landscape.

Just outside of Tallinn we were pulled up (along with every other car on a two lane highway) and breathalysed.

Zero was the result and the policeman wished us a happy journey - there would have been at least 30-40 police and cars used for this operation.

We travelled through the countryside with only very small towns with little or no town centres.

Only a short journey today and the first of many after the massive miles we travelled in Scandinavia.

What a joy this campsite was, perched among the forest trees, enough room for about 10 motorhomes and a patch of grass beyond the fence that would comfortably take 20-30 tents.

There were huts with benches and tables alongside BBQ pits and large community fire places - and believe it or not - they had a hut, brimming full of timber for anyone to use.

Had planned to do a walking trail this afternoon, but instead, claimed the best spot and set about getting the fireplace stocked with timber and kindling ready for what we classify as "our ultimate evening" of good food cooked on the fire, a blazing fire under the stars (though there were none) and our iPod playing our favourite music and of course a beverage or two.

Strangely, the area filled with campers coming in cars and even on bicycles with tents who had the same idea as we did.

It was lovely to see families coming together and enjoying this great place which reminded us so much of when we did this with our kids - we were the only motorhomers there.

### Ida-virumaa, Estonia (Valaste Kula) - Tuesday 26th July 2017 -

We had such a wonderful afternoon and evening the day before, but did not do what we had set out to do by coming to this national park - though got to say the distraction was just wonderful.

The Village is about 100 metres away and offers for viewing, traditional old buildings with exhibits spread around tranquil ponds.

Being a national park it also provided details on the various walks around the park and the animals and plant life that thrive in these forests.

We took our backpacks and water and headed off on the beaver trail in the hope of sighting some of these in their natural habitat at the edge of streams.

Unfortunately, we had a group of tourists with dogs that were in front of us, so any chance of seeing any of these shy creatures was doomed.

Not sure if they allow dogs in national parks here - but would not be surprised as man's best friend seems to be allowed absolutely everywhere over here.

The walk was just great despite the noisy group.

We have not found many spots to wild camp here so our next destination was more so to do some washing and to give the batteries a deep charge by connecting to power.

Think we have only been connected to power at 2 or 3 places in over 4.5 months - Ziggy's solar panels and batteries have been more than ample.

Again at Valasta Kula we are the only motorhome here though they can accommodate 6.

The camp is adjacent to a small restaurant and the lady here said that this northern part of Estonia is not popular and most people prefer the south.

We are right on the Gulf of Finland with magnificent views over the ocean and right across the road from some waterfalls, though these were not very spectacular

### Kallaste, Estonia (Hostel Lagoon) - Wednesday 27th July 2017 -

Kallaste is a seaside village at the entrance to Tartu County.

Only very small with a population of no more than 100 or so people.

Our campsite is on the lake front, Lake Peipsi and the only thing between us and Russia.

There are a number of guests who were out all day in the sunshine and on the beach with many looking a dark shade of crimson by day's end.

The manager here gave us a town map and some history and we set off for a long walk through town and then along the bluff and beach and then back to town to visit



the local fisherman (recommended by the manager) who was a legend and master of cooking smoked fish.

We dropped in and he took us around the back and showed us how it was done.

The fish did not look very appetising and not being a lover of fish, reluctantly bought a full smoked bream with his recommendation and a bottle of pickled gherkins to have with it.

His suggestion (he only spoke Russian so was a bit hard to understand 🙄) was to have the fish with bread and gherkins.

Think we were doomed from the beginning as yours truly is not a lover of fish and his truly does not like gherkins.

Long story short, first mouthful was good until his truly nearly choked on a small bone and we discovered the big fish was full of very small bones.

Canned the fish, ate the gherkins and the slice of bread already buttered and then waited an hour or so before having a chicken (with no bones) for dinner.

#### Otepaa vald, Estonia (Puhajarve Manor) - Thursday 27th July 2017 -

Took photos of "the red rock" on the lakefront - a local tourist attraction and the cemetery.

Like in Poland, the Estonian cemeteries are adorned with flowers and lanterns and exquisite headstones and the setting in this one was lakefront amongst beautiful trees and gardens - really peaceful and beautiful.

Many of the unit blocks throughout the town were in bad repair and most of the people here only speak Russian.

We travelled to Alatskivi to find a few places on the tourist map.

We passed by many roadside caravans selling local produce, particularly onions.

The Lake Peipus region is renowned for its famous onions and they even have a road called "Onion Road" where you can buy all sorts of onions by the bag full if you want.

Many also sell smoked fish - gave that a miss, big time - think we are both over fish for a while.

Nearby, in a little village called Nina we found some really interesting old buildings going back centuries and amongst these a fabulous and secluded waterfront resort.

The cemetery here was one of the prettiest and most colourful we have seen.

Ziggy certainly created some interest here, as I am sure most people here would not have seen a motorhome particularly with GB plates.

We were quite relieved to see Ziggy still there waiting for us on our return.

## Tartu Estonia - Friday 28<sup>th</sup> July 2017 -

Next on to Tartu, Estonia's second largest city where we parked at the top end of town and soon found the KGB Cells Museum which is housed in the infamous "Grey House" which was the regional KGB headquarters in the 1940's and 50's.

Apart from the lock-ups themselves, the museum has extensive exhibits on deportations, life in the gulags and Estonian resistance movements.

Next a 15 minute walk downtown to Old Town.

If you have not already guessed, we are really interested and intrigued by these magic places and hunt them out in each city.

The focal point here is the Town Hall Square which is the marketplace and a cultural gathering point of Tartu and features the Kissing Students fountain.

Again an abundance of churches, museums, open air restaurants and pubs and central seating set amongst colourful flower beds.

The narrow streets also have strings of fairy lights everywhere which in the evening and in winter would be a fairyland.

It began to rain (we have had fabulous weather in Estonia so far) so we made a dash up the hill and then to find a camp for the night.

We had planned to stay longer in Tartu but there is only one registered camp stop here in the Port of Tartu area but it did not take long for us to decide not to stay and move on.

We found an unbelievable camp site in a place called Otepaa, south west of Tartu.

They have 10 dedicated motorhome spots and six of these with electricity.

Only one other motorhome here and it is set in the grounds of a health and spa resort with an indoor pool, gymnasium, sauna, tennis courts and even a ten pin bowling centre with four lanes.

The manicured lawns and trees stretch as far as you can see with bike trails heading in every direction around a small lake.

Wow- double wow- and we can use any of the facilities, have a massage, visit the doctor all for a pittance.

It was late when we arrived, so we checked out the resort ready for use tomorrow and settled in for the night - it is almost dark at night now.

Only 3 motorhomes here overnight but at 9am the car park was filling quickly with families heading for the beach (pebbles only) but beautiful grassy areas next to the pebbles were quickly snapped up.

Off came the bikes and we went exploring.

My power pack always comes with me but my driver opts to go manpower only.

I chuckled when we hit the first really big hill as I turned on the power assist and watched my best friend struggle up.

Last view as I got to the top was his truly walking his bike up (he nearly made it to the top).

Credit where credit is due to his truly - I cheated.

We continued on for some time and then headed back for lunch and a well deserved break.

Enjoyed the afternoon on the beautiful green lawns and people watched until late afternoon.

Fully refreshed, set off again on our bikes - both of us with our power packs.

The bike tracks went on forever and so did we.

First time we have had the opportunity for a long time to travel so far on our bikes - was fantastic.

Had dinner (and sweets) at the Resorts Cafe and listened to some live music (couldn't understand a word) but the beat was great.

## Latvia

### Cesis, Latvia - Saturday 29th July 2017 -

Good news - BIG WIN!!! - over six weeks ago, the day we arrived in Norway in a beautiful little town called Son, we parked in a "free for 24 hour parking zone" and on return from a long walk found an infringement notice flapping on our wipers to the tune of \$AUD100.

We wrote to the local council and complained.

We also lodged a complaint with the parking company Europark.

There was no logical reason for the ticket so stuck to our guns on this one.

We received an official notice from Europark advising that the ticket was cancelled but gave no reason.

Left our resort spa reluctantly - such a beautiful place, free and included electricity at no cost - hard to believe but these places do exist.

We had just finished our last drop of rum the night before and needed to find a shop to restock.

We were out in the country and did not expect to get to a reasonably large town for some time.

We passed by a sign to an Alko 1000 which was just a little out of our way so headed towards the small town to find it.

Don't you just love the name Alko - very appropriate!!

The shop was mega huge and cars and buses were lined up everywhere - like a small city in the middle of nowhere.

We parked Ziggy in the bus zone (there was no room in the car park) and fought our way through the crowds to get through the front door - could not believe what we saw.

People had trolleys stacked and overflowing with beer and spirits- some people had two trolleys.

Couldn't believe what we were seeing so asked a shop assistant why this shop was so busy.

Unbeknown to us, we had crossed the border into Latvia and these were Estonians stocking up across the border at much cheaper prices.

Our last bottle of Captain Morgans rum cost us around €24 for a 700ml bottle but here it was €14 for a litre (that's around \$20).

We bought 3!!! - beer was also €0.70 per 500ml which is around \$1.00 a bottle - not much difference in the cost of wine though - evidently Latvia is heaps cheaper than Estonia and Lithuania but not as cheap as Poland.

The small town of Cesis is in the centre of Gauja National Park and is just delightful.

We parked in the middle of town only 500 metres from their Old Town and Cesis Castle.

Couldn't believe the number of tourists at the Castle, in this small town in the middle of nowhere - several buses had just arrived and the queues to see the castle were a mile long.

Stunning grounds of manicured lawns, picturesque gardens and fountains formed a magic backdrop to the castle.

Old Town is only very small and many of the buildings were in the early stages of restoration - scaffolding hiding some of the beautiful features of the old buildings.

The Old Town Main Street was totally ripped up, no doubt to lay cobblestones at some stage soon to add more appeal to the streetscape.

Quaint shops lined this street, no doubt unhappy right now, but once completed, this street will be the focal point of Old Town.

We stopped at a pizza restaurant just on the corner of Main Street.

We have found most staff in touristy places speak English.

The waitress arrived and spoke to us in a language I couldn't understand.

I asked her if she spoke English and she smiled and said "I am speaking English".

We both laughed and ordered a 45 cm pizza and a couple of beers.

The pizza arrived and it was humungous - we couldn't possibly get through it - a Doggy bag and an hour later, we headed back, so pleased that the darkness of night has returned - have really missed it,

**Riga, Latvia (Riverside Camping) Sunday - 30th July - Monday 31st July 2017 -**

Roadworks, roadworks and more roadworks.

We crept along or should we say, rattled along and felt every bump for what seemed a lifetime.

The cutlery in the drawer danced about and porcelain cups kept in tune - couldn't believe nothing broke.

The capital of Latvia is Riga and has a population of around 700,000 people.

The Sat Nav spat the dummy in the middle of town and we seemed to go round and round in a circle.

Finally gave up on the sat nav in frustration and used the off line map in our iPad.

Finally happy to arrive at our destination, settled in at the marina and enjoyed a restful afternoon with dinner under the awning overlooking the river - very warm now so have put away our winter gear - hopefully.

Caught a taxi to Old Town (taxi recommended by manager here) as the buses only run hourly and cost 2€ each and taxi 6€.

Arrived at Freedom Monument and spent the rest of the day enjoying this fantastic city.

Old Town runs for so many blocks it took hours to roam about and try to see everything.

Most of this part of town was bombed to the ground during WW11 and has been restored to original specs.

This is pretty much the same story at most towns throughout our travels.

So many beautiful churches and cathedrals, museums at nearly every corner and buildings with so much character.

The markets are situated on the river side of the city and consist of 5 massive hangars described as Zeppelin Hangars.

One specifically for deli items such as every conceivable sausage you could want, cheeses, breads, pickled, this and that and jars of unknown goodies.

One was dedicated to all sorts of meats and chickens another for fish and shellfish (even the dreaded smoked fish).

In between there were literally hundreds of stalls selling fresh fruit and vegetables, some of which we did not recognise at all.

Berries of all kinds - strawberries €2 per kilo - blueberries €2 per kilo - tomatoes €1 per kilo.

Just wish we had our backpacks with us as we would have filled them to the brim.

Flowers galore - so colourful and the scents intoxicating.

Clothes, bags, shoes everything you could want was for sale here - and at just the right price.

Kept the wallet under lock and key - so many temptations.

After 5 hours of sheer pleasure and amazement at the wonders of this city, this little person had had enough.

The skies had blackened as we left the markets and it began to rain.

We took shelter in a little bar and enjoyed some local beers while waiting for it to clear.

Took off again for a short while and then gave up after the rain continued and hailed the taxi for home.

## Lithuania

### Domantai, Lithuania - Tuesday 1st August 2017 -

*(Campsite tonight: Parking Domantai - Hill of Crosses)*

Left **Riga**, Latvia this morning.

Soon we reached the Lithuanian border and were asked to show our passports - no further checks were made and the guard wished us a good journey.

### Hill of Crosses

Arrived at the Hill of Crosses, Domantai and again the crowds were massive in this special holy place.

At the entrance there were several stalls selling crosses in every shape and size and people were eagerly buying them and having names engraved on them.

One of Lithuania's most awe inspiring sights.

Quite a solemn walk towards the hill where there were over 100,000 crosses from metres high to inches high, the majority being memorial pieces for lost loved ones.

Steps led the way up the middle of the hill and crosses and statues and rosary beads took up every available space - tons of crosses now buried deeply and overtaken by new ones on top.

The sounds of the thousands of crosses tinkling in the breeze is quite eerie.

The parking area was a designated spot for motorhome overnight parking so along with several others we stayed for the night.

We were surrounded by fields of crops which was just so peaceful and green - not sure what was growing but it looked very healthy.

Woke up in the middle of the night by flashes of lightning and thunder and then massive wind which rocked poor Ziggy.

Then the rain and hail started and we spent a couple of nervous hours waiting for it to stop.

Back to sleep again and hoped we had no damage.

### Wed 2nd - Thurs 3rd August 2017 - from Hill of Crosses to Kaunas to Vilnius

*(Campsite for tonight: - Parking Vilnius)*

Left Hill of Crosses.

Checked everything and all was okay after last night's storm - thank goodness.

The skies were still overcast with a drizzle of rain so happily we moved on.

Rain became quite heavy and again lightning and thunder all around us.

Decided to pull over and have a cuppa at a motel site until the weather cleared again.

### Kaunas

We arrived in [Kaunas](#) and stopped at the Museum of the 9th Fort about 7kms north of the town. This museum comprises an old WWI era fort and bunker like church of the damned.

Also at this location, a carved stone monument which stands about 15 storeys high is perched high on the hill and overlooks Kaunas.

Engraved faces and fists stand at the top of stone pedestals of the monument and huge plaques on the ground tell of the gruesome atrocities of the Nazis and of the thousands upon thousands of bodies killed by the Nazis and buried here - 50,000 bodies are buried here in a mass grave.

### Vilnius

Our timing for arrival in this huge city [Vilnius](#) was not desirable (5pm) and one wrong turn saw our sat nav take Ziggy through the narrowest streets, through car parks and sometimes with only an inch or two between us and the cars double and triple parked on both sides of a narrow street.

There does not seem to be any rules about parking in these Eastern European countries - wherever and whichever way you are facing is where you park - be it on a corner, half a car on the footpath - doesn't seem to matter.

The navigator gave a wrong call and took us right bang smack into a massive traffic jam and with streets merging every 50 or so metres, we did not move more than a few inches in half an hour.

The driver was very calm and the navigator remained very quiet and happy to make no further calls and allowed sat nav to give directions.

Arrived at Parking Vilnius just before 6pm which is only a couple of blocks from the start of Old Town.

It caters for several motorhomes, buses and cars and at a cost of €6 per night was exceptional value as it so central.

After a soothing and nerve calming drink, we headed into Old Town to have some dinner.

The streets were alive with tourists and every cafe with outdoor eating was already packed with queues waiting to get good seats where you could watch the passing crowds.

We found a cafe claiming to have the best Lithuanian food so stood in the queue waiting our turn to nab a good seat.

Didn't take long and soon we were presented with potato and bacon pancakes and stuffed potato dumplings.

Not good for the waistline and very heavy but intended to walk it off before heading home.

Spent the next two hours walking through the streets and getting our bearings for tomorrow.

A surprisingly quiet night given how close we were to everything.

Most of the cars were gone when we came back leaving about 6 motorhomes and a couple of buses who had dropped off their tourists at hotels and parked here overnight.

We spent the whole day walking around Old Town which is spread over several hectares and I believe has 27 museums and 26 cathedrals.

Buskers were entertaining in some of the main streets, all hoping to get a share of the tourists hard earned dollars. Some were absolutely amazing.

We again had to have lunch and chose another cafe and tried some more local food - this time a lighter meal for both of us.

Along came a young boy, looked about 8 years old carrying a piano accordion and a chair.

He perched on the footpath between a few of the restaurants and with a massive smile on his face, began playing the piano accordion which looked so huge on his small frame.

He swayed back and forth, tapping his feet to the tune.

He made big bucks in the hour we were there - heaps more than the other buskers and really played the crowd (particularly the women) with his smile.

On the border of Old Town, we found the botanical gardens which followed the river.

The gardens, flowers and fountains were just so inviting so we sat and watched the endless stream of mothers (and grandmothers) taking babies for a stroll.

### **Friday 4th August - Vilnius to Merkine, Lithuania**

*(Campsite for tonight: Parking Memel)*

#### **Left Vilnius**

Travelled from the city back into the countryside. Lots more farmland now and richer soil and crops growing everywhere.

#### **Merkine**

We are heading back to Poland now and there is only a small gap to get from Lithuania to Poland without going into Belarus or Russia so we headed south west to a really beautiful little town called [Merkine](#).



The campsite is beneath a bridge and on the river and only has a couple of dedicated spots for motorhomes and is a free camp.

There is a small sandy beach and lots of lovely green grass so was popular with the locals during the day.

As usual we put on our walking shoes and headed into town hopefully to get a coffee.

We took the long way round through the natural park with streams and little rickety bridges crossing them and then to THE HILL - a challenge with 98 steps up and when we got to the top, the same number back down - ugh!!

Don't think we will come back this way.

Closer to town, we passed cottages, each with fruit trees (mostly green and red apples).

So many trees with fruit all over the ground - thought about picking up some for some stewed Apple - but didn't have anything to carry them back with.

No coffee shops (or any cafe of any kind in town) so bought an ice cream (similar to a Magnum) for around \$1.50 and headed back.

There was some activity under the bridge when we got back.

There was quite a large boat in the water and a group of people were trying to get the boat onto a trailer.

They struggled for some time and managed to not only get the trailer stuck in the mud but the car also now had its back wheels stuck.

There was no concrete ramp so had no idea why they even tried to get the boat out here - only grass leading into the water and then mud- recipe for disaster.

Rob took his levelling ramps down and offered his help.

Long story, but it took us and six other adults a couple of hours with a lot of rocks and sand and all of us assisting with ropes to get them out of trouble.

The families were Polish and we really enjoyed the couple of hours we spent helping them (they were just delightful).

The boat owner invited us to visit him at his camping place in Poland and we exchanged contact information.

## Poland

Left Merkinė, Lithuania heading for Poland

### [Suwalki Poland](#)

First chore for the day, was to find somewhere to repair our back tyre which had been slowly losing air since Helsinki.

We have been filling up with fuel and at the same time topping up the tyre.

Couldn't see a puncture so guessed it was a leaky valve.

As it was getting worse needed to find a tyre repair shop and soon.

We passed many service stations along the way, many had no air hose at all and some who were not able to give us the 5.5 Bars (80PSI) we needed to pump up the tyre.

The most air pressure we were able to get was 3 Bars so we headed to the largest town closest to us and drove very slowly towards Suwalki on a tyre which was inflated to at best around 3 Bars.

We did a quick google translation and needed a shop that said Opony (polish for tyre).

It was now midday Saturday and based on our information, most stores closed around noon on a Saturday.

Yeah!!! - after two tyre repair shops were unable to fit us in today, we were able to find a shop and within an hour we were hoisted up, the tyre removed (with a lot of effort) hole plugged up (hole in middle of tyre) and tyre refitted to Ziggy (with a lot of effort) - a total of 40 Zloty - a mere \$15.00 for all that work and we were away again.

### Augustow Poland

Next we travelled to Augustow where there was a great place we wanted to camp in at a marina near the centre of town.

Driving through town, it was obvious this is one of the hot holiday spots in Poland and felt apprehensive regarding a vacancy here.

The town was packed, the beaches were packed, people everywhere.

We could hardly get anywhere near the gates to the marina.

Looked a fantastic place to stay but certainly not during the peak season.

After a frustrating 20 minutes, we quickly headed out of town and tried to find Plaska and Plaska Water Station, the home of our friends we helped bring their boat and car out at Merkinie.

### Plaska Poland

*(Campsite: Stanica Wodna Plaska)*

[www.kanal-augustowski.pl](http://www.kanal-augustowski.pl)

email: [Andrzej@kanal-Augustowski.pl](mailto:Andrzej@kanal-Augustowski.pl) Ph: 502667272

Andrzej (Andrew) and Gosha (Margaret) and Jacob (their son) greeted us like long lost friends and quickly made us feel at home.

We parked on a beautiful lush green lawn, right on Kanal Augustowski, where ducks swam happily past the beautiful water flowers.

We were surrounded by campers in tents, caravans and some in sleeping bags ready to settle down under the stars.

There are also cabins for hire and 4 boats ready to take away for a week at a time and navigate the beautiful waterways.

The waterway consists of 18 locks - 14 locks through Poland 1 right on the border with Belarus and 3 through Belarus (no visas required by Belarus but you can't leave the boat for a swim!!!)

Space is limited for motorhomes so would suggest phoning first to check availability.

There are Kanal front huts with tables and chairs and a small restaurant and bar serving absolutely delicious Polish food.

We were lucky to sample the absolutely "must have" home made Kartacze (potato dumplings filled with meat, seasoned with onions and pork) and two beautiful Salads and sampled two amazing homemade liqueurs made with Andrzej's secret recipe.

A secret hideaway away from it all in the midst of a tiny little place only 20 kms away from Augustow - a must to see and spend some relaxing days.

### [Jezioro Nidzkie \(Lake Nidzkie\)](#)

*(Camp in the forest)*

We had keyed in the co ordinates for a camp spot called Camping U Basi, Jaskowo, west of Pisz, however on the way, we found a great free camp about 3 kms from our proposed destination.

Designated as Parking, it was a large grassed area at the beginning of the National Forest.

There were a few houses about and given that it was off the beaten track, we were surprised how many cars and bicycles actually went by.

We had passed quite a few of these Parking spots but didn't realise they were part of the National Forest.

We saw several fishermen go into the forest.

Eager to find out where the forest tracks led, we put on our backpacks and followed the tracks through the forest.

The tracks were marked at each intersection, so these were designated walking tracks.

Only a few minutes in we came to the massive lake and followed the track right around the lake.

So quiet and peaceful and nothing but us and the huge forest trees.

Walked for about an hour and decided to head back.

Suddenly about 50 metres away a group of 8 deer ran across the track in front of us.

Too slow to get the camera going so missed that photo opportunity.

My father loved the forests in Poland and I can remember the stories he told of collecting berries and mushrooms in the forest.

We have seen many people in our travels walking with buckets in hand and picking berries and mushrooms.

We didn't see any berries but came across several species of mushrooms - one with a beautiful bright red top - looks more like a flower.

Do not know enough about which ones you can eat so left them be.

Really enjoyed this beautiful place.

### Lomza

*(Camp: Camping Mozir - Port Lomza)*

A really well set up camp spot at a small marina on the edge of town.

Pricing information in "Campings" was incorrect - instead of €15 + electricity it was a mere €6.5 incl electricity.

We advised them of the inaccuracy as I am sure the camp would be packed if they changed this info.

Set around a beautiful park and river which provided kids playground, gym equipment and a great bikeway.

The place was packed with people coming and going all day and night.

A great pizza restaurant and bar only metres away, which we just had to try, overlooking the park.

Took the bikes for a ride into town but once the bikeway stopped, we had to negotiate around the crazy drivers and narrow footpaths.

A little too hard for this novice rider so happily walked the bikes back to the bikeways and pedalled home.

Spent a relaxing day the following day catching up on some reading and gave Ziggy a well deserved spring clean.

### Drohiczyn

(Coord N 52.393311: E 22.661150)

*Wild camp at restaurant on Bug River*

We are still totally amazed at how impatient, aggressive and dangerous the drivers in Poland are.

We keep to the speed limit and are regularly passed as if we were standing still and are regularly passed over double unbroken white lines, going uphill and or round corners.

This part of Poland has no rest stops at all and it has been virtually impossible to find any camp sites whether free or at a cost so close to the Russian and Belarusian borders.

The roads today were so bad and we really looked forward to stopping for a break.

Found by chance this great spot on the Bug River at Drohiczyn with large grassy area and a restaurant which serves traditional Polish food.

Sat in a massive undercover outside area at the restaurant and watched locals riding bikes, horses and swimming.

After a delicious Polish dinner, we camped here for the night overlooking the Bug river.

### Biala Podlaska - 10th - 16th August

Arrived in Biala Podlaska on Thursday evening 10<sup>th</sup> August and stayed until the following Wednesday 16th August - again into the welcoming arms of my Polish Family.

Barbara and Kornelia had just returned from a scuba diving holiday in the Canary Islands and were still on holidays when we arrived.

Piotr was home for 4 days before taking off to Spain with a group of Russian tourists (he is the coach driver) and Kornelia joined us on Friday evening for 4 days before heading back to Warsaw University.

We enjoyed six great days and nights here - some with only Google Translate to translate for us and the rest with Kornelia translating for us.

It is quite a lot of fun using Google to speak and translate and quite often Google does not quite understand our Australian accents and gets the words all wrong which makes us all break out in fits of laughter.

We do get to say lots more when Kornelia is around to translate for us.

Barbara has been taking English classes for quite a few months now and is able to understand quite a lot as long as we speak very, very slowly.

Friday was a really big day for us.

Finally, after more than 12 months, I received my Polish passport - a marathon effort - so many times I thought of giving up.

The whole process (in excess of 12 months) was not made easy by the Polish Government Citizenship and Passport offices.

You may wonder why we went to all the time, trouble and expense to obtain dual Citizenship (Australia and Poland) and a Polish Passport for me but the following are the reasons why:-

Australian passport holders can only stay in the Schengen Zone for 3 months in total before being required to exit the Schengen Zone for 3 months before being able to return to the Zone again.

That would have made our trip around Europe (about 30 countries) very awkward, inefficiently time consuming and expensive to organise.

Now we can both stay in the Schengen Zone indefinitely without having to leave.

Additionally, we can also enjoy the benefits available to European Citizens such as opening bank accounts, purchasing vehicles, taking up permanent residency and purchasing real estate.

We also wanted to be able to provide an option for our 2 daughters, should they wish to do so, to be able to apply for Polish Citizenship themselves, via hereditary access rights.

We feel that the way the world is changing it would be good for the girls to have that option – if they don't want to take it up then fine.

I refer to Barbara as my little sister now - the sister I have never had.

Barbara, Piotr and Kornelia have been so wonderful and leaving this time has been so very hard as we know the chances of coming back soon are slim.

They have promised to visit us in Australia and we believe they will come.

Ziggy was in real need of a pair of new shoes on the front (having done in excess of 20,000 kms on some terrible roads), so Piotr kindly arranged for the delivery and fitting of 2 new tyres and when they arrived on Wednesday, we said our "not goodbye but see you later" and sadly left Biala Podlaska.

### **Liwiec Thursday 17th August**

#### **Our campsite for the night - Zaliwie-Szpinki (Coord N 52.258565 E 22.090296)**

At a cost of 40zł or around \$15, we found another magic Polish holiday spot. Remote and in a rural setting. It offers swimming and kayaks for hire.

A great flat grassed area with the locals (cows) just a stones throw away (fortunately behind a fence so campsite was not littered with farm cakes).

Weekends here are packed, but again we were alone and had only the owners to share with.

Groups are catered for with a huge marquee, kitchen and undercover dining area. Basic meals and drinks are available - though expect this is not open for one or two people.

There are over 70 kayaks for hire here. They provide WC, shower, water and electricity (though by long extension lead only)

Enjoyed a great steak on our BBQ - picked up at Lidl after leaving Biala, and washed it down with a reasonably good red.

### **Friday 18th August**

Left Liwiec

Wanted to get through to the western side of Warsaw today and as all roads seem to lead to Warsaw, we had no option but to go through this great Polish Capital.

Arrived in Warsaw just before lunch but the traffic was still horrible and took quite some time to get through to the western side.

There just was nowhere to stop to have lunch, so pulled into a large service station for a short lunch break.

There were no customers at all as their fuel prices were quite high and no one was anywhere to be seen.

Then an angry pony tailed specimen of a man (I am giving him a good description) came out of the shop and not so politely told us to move on.

This is the first time we have experienced anyone in Poland that has not been so helpful and polite.

People here are great and we hope that soon, Poland will open more camping facilities and service points as we feel more tourists will come if they are available.

Travelled through acre after acre and mile after mile and town after town of fruit and vegetables growing on both sides of the road.

Maize, strawberries, cabbages, cauliflower, radish, beetroot and spinach to name a few. We are sure Poland must be the salad bowl of Europe.

Apart from the large farms everywhere, every house has its own vegetable patch in the back yard.

When in Biala, Barbara came home every day with fresh fruit and vegetables she picked up from a local farmer (apart from the veges she has in her hot house out the back).

### Near Skoki Male, Poland - Gosciniec Pod Zaglamco

#### **Our campsite for the night was (Coord N 52.60425 E 19.41930)**

After 2 unsuccessful wild goose chases trying to find a camp for the night, we found a roadside resort with massive amounts of parking, including parking bays for trucks.

We figured if they welcomed trucks we had a chance.

We dropped into the bar and spoke to the owner who was more than happy for us to stay the night but apologised that he had no facilities for us to use.

The rest is history - we had a couple of drinks and sat by the huge lake and watched sailing boats dock at the small marina and come in for dinner and then sail away into the sunset.

We spoke about how much we missed our boat and the sea and agreed that after our overseas adventure, we would find another boat.

The outdoor area and gardens are just beautiful so we stayed, had dinner (so reasonably priced) and then settled in for the night - very quiet and slept peacefully.

### **Friday 19th August**

Left Gosciniec Pod Zaglamco.

Decided that tonight, we would find a camping ground instead of trying to find a wild camp so travelled for a couple of hours only.

We had had a couple of long days driving - today, it would be a shorter drive.

## Wrezesnia

### **Our campsite for the night: Camping Wrzesnia**

Again our Sat Nav took us on a wild goose chase.

Have had enough of this Sat Nav - so many times it has let us down, particularly in the bigger towns.

Have decided to buy a Garmin Camper 770 at first opportunity.

Tried to find this in Poland but they don't stock it as there is very little requirement as it is motorhome and camping specific.

Expect to find it in Berlin in a few days - happy to toss the one we have out the window!!

Finally, after a "cook's tour" of this town - compliments again of our Sat Nav - we found this camp site.

Looked like a demolition derby - massive trees with girth of 1-2 metres, totally uprooted - some torn in half - trucks full of tree carcasses - chain saws going at every corner - looked like a massive tornado had been through this part of town.

Owner didn't speak English so couldn't get an explanation from them.

Searched the web and found that massive storms had hit this part of Poland approx 6 days earlier, leaving some fatalities and the Polish Media saying that it would take until 2019 to clear the damaged trees in the forests.

The campsite generally would take around 20 motorhomes but only about 6 pitches had been cleared of debris and were able to be used.

We camped in the one with the least amount of trees standing nearby!

The campsite is on a waterway and we took a walk around it - just couldn't believe what we saw - so thankful we were not parked here during this massive storm.

Again, we were the only motorhome here.

### **Saturday - 20th August to Monday 21st August**

Left Wrezesnia and unfortunately did not take photos of the devastation.

We passed forests with only a few trees left – complete forests totally demolished for miles and miles.

Strangely, we did not see any damaged houses so hope they escaped with little or no damage.

## Poznan

### **Our campsite for two nights: Hotel-Camping, Malta, Poznan**



So happy to see the countryside return to normal (no damaged trees)

Again our Sat Nav let us down and once we arrived in Poznan we went round and round in circles.

When we were within 400 metres of the first camp site we selected our Sat Nav took us to a low railway bridge which we had no way of making it under without leaving our satellite TV dome embedded in the concrete.

With no way around it, we selected Sat Nav option 2 and again were provided with incorrect information but we finally arrived.

One of the most expensive camp sites we have stayed in at 90 Zl - just over \$33 per night but really well located and only a short distance by tram to Old Town.

Research told us that Poznan has a great Old Town (forgot to mention, we picked up a 50 GB internet package in Biala (thank you Kornelia) for 20 Zl (\$8) so can use internet day and night until we get to Germany.

Took the No 8 tram - about 500 metres walk away and 6 stops later arrived at the Old Markets in Old Town.

Spent some 6 hours there and took happy snaps by the bucketful.

We are so intrigued and so drawn to these building treasures that have been so beautifully restored.

An absolute gold mine for these cities, where tourists and locals gather in the thousands daily and into the evening and enjoy the restaurants and entertainment provided there.

Of course dinner and a few shots of our favourite vodka (mad dog - vodka with a dash of cherry syrup and a few drops of Tabasco) which we found in a pub on the way out - warmed us for our tram trip and the 500 m walk home.

We have been invaded at the camp site by Italians - about 20 motor homes belonging to a club are here for a couple of days - should be fun!

We have gone from being the only motorhome whilst wild camping to all of a sudden a United Nations of about 40 motorhomes, side by side.

Slept in till around 8.30 - late for us.

This place is set on a huge lake which has an Olympic class 2 km x 9 lane rowing course.

On both sides of the rowing course, there are indoor and outdoor pools and water slides, toboggan rides, tube rides and so much more for families to enjoy.

We had planned to walk to the massive shopping centre at the end of the lake - 3kms away and then come back and go biking.

We did the walk round trip of around 8kms and that was the end of that.

The bikeways were fantastic - probably best we have seen so far - but just didn't have the energy.

The weather in Poland since returning here a couple of weeks ago has been sunny and some days even hot - last couple of days it is getting cooler in the evenings - think we have had our two weeks of summer now!

Rest of the day was spent reading and catching up on info for the blog site.

### **Monday 21st August**

We have now seen so much of Poland and this time again taking a different route.

We are headed for the border between Poland and Germany with one more stop on the way in Poland to stock up on supplies (alcohol and meat in particular). and selected the place to camp but again, found a gem along the way.

### **Wild camp in Nadlesnictwo Skwierzyna – forest**

#### **Our campsite for the night : (Coordinates N52.59115 E15.32806)**

There is a massive national forest on both sides of Highway 24.

We had passed a couple of designated parking places in the forest along the way and commented that now that we are about to leave Poland we have found the illusive places to stop and park and camp for the night.

Just couldn't resist so pulled in at the next one.

Only facilities were tables and dustbins but it is really hard to describe the majestic trees and the lush mossy ground cover with a multitude of different coloured moss and plants.

Saw mushrooms growing not far from our camp site.

We have had perfect weather this time round in Poland but today the rain clouds came over and it bucketed down for most of the late afternoon.

The temperature is dropping day by day and is quite cool at night now - almost time to bring the winter woolies into play again.

Wanted to walk along the forest tracks again but rain prevented us from leaving Ziggy so a quiet and restful afternoon was on the agenda.

### **Tuesday 22nd August**

Woke up to an overcast day and it wasn't long before a car pulled up beside us.

Out came the gum boots, hats and baskets and off they trundled into the forest to pick mushrooms.

We had seen some mushrooms yesterday but there were heaps more this morning.

Saw another half dozen or so parking spots further down the road, so for the traveller, a goldmine of places to camp along this highway.

Cars were parked at every available spot with eager mushroom pickers seen tramping through the forest.

## Kostrzyn nad Odra

Last town on the highway before leaving Poland, we stopped here to stock up on wine and food supplies.

As usual Lidl was our first stop but only a small one so not a lot of wine to choose from.

Polish people are generally not wine drinkers so the selection has not been great so have stocked up on the labels we recognise.

Have had some woeful wines in our travels.

The fridge is full, the bar is full and so ready to move forward to our next adventures in Germany – another country, another language, another currency and other challenges.

## Lebus, Germany - Tuesday - Wednesday 22-23rd August

### **Campsite for two nights: Ausflugsgastatte Anglerheim**

Back into Germany now and decided to spend a few days in the countryside before going into the big smoke of Berlin.

Travelled south from the border to a little town called Lebus which is on the Oder River.

Passed along many tree lined roads on the way.

This free campsite is just magical and can take a huge number of motorhomes and cars.

When we arrived, there were two German motorhomes there.

Located right on the Oder river with just a large green grassed area between Ziggy and the river.

The Anglerheim Restaurant fronts the car park and over the two days was really popular with the locals for both lunch and dinner.

It has a great outdoor area so we took advantage of this and enjoyed a couple of beers late afternoon and then ventured into the restaurant which was fitted out with German artefacts and waitresses wearing traditional outfits.

First time since our disastrous episode with the smoked fish, that we ordered fish for dinner - salmon and mackerel was just amazing - and no bones.

Lebus is right smack in the middle of a bike track that goes north or south forever along the Oder River.

A kind of backpackers style Accommodation in this little town is focused on bikers who travel for days along this bikeway, most who also carry basic camping gear on their bikes.

Decided to stay another night here and do our first big bike ride for a while.

Set off after breakfast - again my best friend opting to go by manpower alone while his navigator again taking battery power (just in case!!!).

The bike track was amazing - bitumen all the way and reasonably flat.

Through the countryside on one side and the river on the other we pedalled for over 20kms and though absolutely breathtaking scenery but did not come across that little village we wanted to stop at and have a pint or two and mix with the locals.

Mostly all farm land here - came back a little tired so stopped for a rest for a while and padlocked up the bikes and then ventured up into the little town by foot.

Robbed the bank of some euros and headed back to Ziggy for some well deserved R & R.

Sat and watched the multitudes of bikers come and go - most stopping at the restaurant for coffee and ice cream before heading on to wherever.

Next morning, we saw Milo and Otis going for a stroll - tickled my fancy watching owner and dog going for a walk with the cat a couple of paces behind.

So unusual seeing cat and dog going together for a stroll.

Just loved this great camp and would highly recommend it.

#### Muncheberg - Germany - Thursday 24th. August

Spent a few minutes speaking with Barbara and Ramsay - Ramsay's 86th birthday today - happy Birthday Ramsay, so glad you had such a great day with friends – we then headed off after a slow and relaxing start to the day.

Didn't travel very far today as planned to spend another night outside of Berlin and then venture in tomorrow for the weekend.

#### **Campsite for tonight: Parkplatz Muncheberg, Muncheberg, Germany**

After a couple of bad choices for our overnight campsite and some not so forgiving cobble stone roads – (Ziggy just hates these and so does the driver), - we found Parkplatz Muncheberg.

Just outside of the CBD of this small town, there is a great Parkplatz which is away from the hustle and bustle of town but only a few minutes walk to the centre.

There are lots of spaces, but again we are the only ones here.

We needed to buy a new bike pump as the Chinese one we brought with us from Australia only succeeded in letting the air out of our bikes instead of the opposite.

Found a bike shop and invested in one that did the right thing.

Made friends with a little girl - 6 years old who was very intrigued with Ziggy and rode round and round us for ages before stopping to talk to us.

She only spoke German so our conversation was quite amusing but she was just delightful and we really enjoyed trying out our limited German with her.

She smiled many times and shrugged her shoulders when she couldn't understand us - so cute but we were concerned why she was out on her own on her bike talking to strangers.

Next morning she appeared with her whole family who ventured out on bikes together.

Another really lovely little town with some very unusual buildings.

### Berlin Germany - Friday 25th - Monday 28th August

#### Campsite for three nights: Wohnmobil Oase- Berlin

For the first time our Sat Nav behaved itself and did not do anything tricky on the way into Berlin.

We had a dream run and it wasn't until the last 50 metres that we took a wrong turn.

Not the fault of the Sat Nav. - just a case of missing the entry to the campsite.

This not going to save the Sat Nav though as we will be buying a new Garmin Camper 770 whilst in Berlin and committing the old unit to the scrap heap.

The Garmin will have the NKC, ACSI and Motorhome Facts databases preloaded so this will make it much easier to research and locate the sites we want to go to.

We had reservations about staying at this particular campsite, but even though the campsite is really old, it was so central and the staff were so great, we really enjoyed our stay here.

We didn't use the WC or bathroom facilities as they were quite limited for the size of the park.

Comments on the blog sites about sirens were correct - such a big city kept police and other emergency services busy continually and only being 3kms out, sirens were heard day and night.

Noise from the nearby airport did not bother us at all as we were out all day and so tired at night, nothing would keep us awake.

The restaurant area near the local S and UBahn stations (Gesundbrunnen) was full of Muslims – we went there to have dinner one evening but changed our minds as restaurant after restaurant was full of men only – not a female in sight – we did not feel comfortable so left the area.

Berlin is certainly a multicultural city – on the walk from Alexander Platz to Brandenburg Gate (a couple of kilometres) it was very rare to hear the German language spoken.

Day one, we went exploring without the aid of the SBahn, UBahn or buses and walked into Friederich Strasse - 3 km away and did some preliminary sightseeing.

After that we walked to Alexanderplatz where we purchased our new Garmin Sat Nav system – we tried to buy it online whilst in Poland but for some reason the online agents would not mail it to Poland.

Went down as far as the Brandenbrerg Gate and then after a long drink and a short break tried to find our way home.

Long story short - we arrived home exhausted after over 7 hours of walking and just crashed after a wonderfully exhausting day.

This campsite closes its gates after 8pm to vehicular traffic but entry via pedestrian gate with key is permitted afterwards.

Took a while to get motivated next morning as we were keen to try out the new sat nav.

After a frustrating couple of hours trying to download the maps and with crashes every couple of minutes and each time sucking valuable data from our now limited supply of Sim card data, we closed everything down and hit the tourist trail.

We purchased a two day Berlin Welcome Card which entitled us to unlimited transport and up to 50% discount on entrance to museums and attractions and restaurants and then total confusion reigned for the next two days.

Won't go into detail, but I think over the next two days, we spent more time, taking the wrong trams, going the wrong way and then trying to come back than we did on day one walking everywhere.

Each day we came home absolutely exhausted after 8- 9 hours of being out and about but we have to say that this city is absolutely amazing and the sights and places we visited over the three days were just unbelievable as the photos will show.

From the Berlin Dom Cathedral - the Brandenburg Gates - Reichstag (parliament House) - the Berlin Wall - Checkpoint Charlie and so many museums.

At the Berlin Dom we climbed the 271 steps to the top (and then back down again) – the view from the top was great.

The area around Checkpoint Charlie is really tacky and we encountered more American youngsters in that area than we have anywhere else on our tour.

It was interesting in that the younger generation seemed more interested in history surrounding the Berlin Wall rather than the second world war – maybe the war was too long ago whereas the Wall came down around 1989 and their parents memories of those events would still have been fairly fresh.

We could have stayed many more days and it really wasn't until day three that we became familiar with the complicated but efficient transport system in this great city.

This campsite takes over 100 motorhomes and over the three days we met so many really great people.

Dirk and Petra Neumann from Oldenberg, Germany were our neighbours for a couple of days and invited us to visit their home after we leave Berlin.

When they left on day two, Petra left us with a basket full of tomatoes and the longest cucumber I have ever seen, grown in her garden and promised they would refill our vegetable stocks when we visit them in Oldenberg.

Our blog friends, Debbie and Mike Cohen from the Gold Coast, arrived on Sunday afternoon and we met them for a drink and exchanged travel stories over a cuppa.

We hope to catch up again somewhere before they head back to Oz next April.

Got to say our feet gave up before the thirst to see more of Berlin and after day three and probably 27 hours on our feet during that time, we decided to have a couple of days rest away from the buzz, noise, sirens, sights, fantastic buildings, history and attractions of this great city.

Reluctantly we left on Monday morning.

We have a big decision to make when we exit the gate at the campsite – should we turn left or right?

### **Monday 28th August- Germany**

We were eager to get back to the countryside now after three fabulous energised days in Berlin though Rob was feeling a little worried there was something important he missed seeing here.

"I am worried that we will not have time to see everything in Europe that we want to see, we are running out of time" - were his comments as we drove out. - only around 18 months to go!

The trip out of Berlin was trouble free.

Think our old Sat Nav heard it was due to be replaced soon.

We had tried to upload the maps to the new Garmin Camper 770 (NAVIE) using our internet data and soaked up the lot only to have it crash twice in the process.

Over 7.9 GB needed for this exercise.

We will have to get a new SIM card or find a place with good internet to update NAVIE.

We travelled along miles of tree lined roads and when these stopped the tree lined streets were replaced with massive wind turbines.

Germany has certainly given these big monsters a big tick.

### **Zossen - Campsite for tonight: Flair Hotel Reuner.**

Only a short trip was planned for today to give the feet a chance to recover.

The Hotel offered a great area for motorhomes at the rear of the building in a beautiful garden and grassed area.

There is no cost to stay here as long as you spend some money in the hotel or alternatively the fee stated is €5 for the night and you get to use their facilities when open.

They also supply electricity if need be.

NAVIE was excited to swallow up their free internet and soon was up and running.

Left the driver with his new toy and ventured into the village on foot.

The village is only very small with just a couple of shops so returned in a little over an hour.

Strange though to see a traffic jam on the Main Street of this little village in the middle of nowhere.

Shame about the lawn mower and whipper snipper that happily munched grass and shrubs around us for the rest of the afternoon - not the peace and quiet (after Berlin) that we had hoped for.

Noise all done for the day, we sat and enjoyed what was left of a beautiful sunny day in this colourful garden setting.

### **Torgau, Germany - Tuesday 29th August -**

#### **Campsite for tonight: Elbeparkplatz, Torgau**

€5.10 overnight or free up to 10 hours (some motorhomers arrived after 6pm and left before 8 - staff collected money at 5pm and then 9am - how sad!)

Rob's birthday today and his choice for tonight had to be a small village with a great restaurant and some atmosphere.

The campsite is right on the Elbe River and only caters for 5 motorhomes (though by next morning there were 7 parked there).

Some locals use this to park during the day as the village centre is only about a ten minute walk.

[Torgau](#) is the place where during the Second World War, United States Army forces coming from the west met forces of the Soviet Union coming from the east during the invasion of Germany on 25 April 1945, which is now remembered as "Elbe Day".

We strolled up and down the quaint cobble stoned streets and checked out the restaurants - most were around the Castle perimeter and St Mary's Cathedral and of course into Market Square - the centre of town (and of course with the regulatory fountain).

Rose gardens were everywhere starting from our campsite though to the Market Square.

We are still getting used to knowing whether places are open or closed and it is a matter of giving the door handle a go to see.



Tried to buy a SIM card but at €15 for 1 GB - gave it a miss - WOW how expensive is that compared to Poland.

Sat and people watched - with a not so small black beer - for an hour or so before returning to Ziggy for a rest before dinner.

Choice for tonight was an Italian restaurant, Calabrese, just off the Market Square, which catered for about 20 outside and some inside.

A perfect sunny day led to a balmy summers night, Italian food and funny and friendly staff were more than fantastic.

### **Wednesday 30th August - Germany**

#### **Colditz Castle and Escape Museum**

First place of interest to visit was Colditz Castle and Museum.

We booked an extended tour with Steffi our English speaking guide for 2pm and with a couple of hours to soak up, headed into town (Castle was on the top of the hill overlooking town - so all down hill - think we are gluttons for punishment).

Rewarded ourselves with an iced coffee before climbing the many stairs back up hill.

We were very lucky to have Steffi as our personal guide as her knowledge of the castle and its history was really great and with the extended tour you get access to all the escape tunnels and the famous glider etc.

There were many escape attempts, many executions of captured escapees and around 31 escapees made it to freedom.

There was a TV series with David McCallum and Robert Wagner made about the castle in the early 70's.

Some of the notable prisoners included the Englishman Douglas "Tin Legs" Bader and Charles Upham, a Kiwi, who was the only person during World War 2 to be honoured with the Victoria Cross twice.

The castle is huge and is still under renovation – even now secret hiding spots, radios, cameras etc that the prisoners had for their escape plans are still being uncovered as work continues.

#### **Dobeln, Germany**

#### **Campsite for tonight: Welcome Wellness & Sport, Dobeln, Germany**

What a fantastic sports facility - sports fields all round and a building that provides apart from a restaurant, climbing wall, bowling, badminton, tennis, gymnasium, solarium - just to name a few.

Only 3 spots available for motorhomes and again, we were first to arrive and were then joined by a Polish couple who spoke excellent German.

Rob got on well with them and soon was happily jabbering away in his best German.

Quite busy during the day, but after 6pm - just so quiet and peaceful - though one of the hottest days we have experienced with the evening not cooling below 25 degrees.

Rained during the night so hope this will cool things down for tomorrow.

### **Thursday 31st August - Germany**

Travelled though rain squalls most of the day and were disappointed when the place we chose to stay at today, did not look anything like the picture in the "Parkings APP" - picture showed it overlooking water - not so.

We moved on and though not planned, arrived at the Czech border – a new day, a new country, a new language, a new currency and new challenges – bring them on.

### **Czech Republic**

#### **Chabarovice, Czech Republic - Thursday 31st August**

We entered Czech via a secondary road and received a bit of a culture shock.

The roads were horrific and in really bad condition.

The first town we passed through was the worst we had seen.

Buildings dilapidated, ugly grey coloured cement buildings - very depressing and with the rain coming down, it was dark and dismal which didn't help our first impression of this country.

We have experienced this a few times now when we have left an affluent country and travelled to a poorer country, the towns and roads just across the border have been sadly neglected.

Our stop for the night was not far over the border and was beside a lake.

#### **Campsite for tonight: Autokemp Chabarovice - 2 nights**

Mostly accommodated tourists in cabins with about 5 spots for vans or campers or tents.

Still raining when we arrived and didn't let up for two days.

Didn't get to walk anywhere - first time we have had such bad weather for two days straight.

Internet was good so took advantage of our down time to do research on Prague.

Would not recommend this place as drinking water only available by the bucket - no grey water disposal area - chemical toilet disposal was dumping this into a toilet in the men's block - not pleasant as other motorhomers would know.

Showers were at an additional cost as was power - we have not got any Czech money yet - so not an option.

Happily used Ziggy for showers as the campsite showers looked like they were extremely old and dirty and filled up the water tanks by bucket before we left.

Probably in better weather conditions, the lakeside would have made this place more attractive.

### Prague - 2nd - 5th September

The countryside and buildings and roads improved dramatically as we ventured closer to Prague - expected this and with the help of our new NAVIE, had no trouble finding our campsite for the next few days.

#### **Campsite for 3 nights: Autocamp Dana Troja, Prague**

Reviews for this place were excellent and though more expensive than some others, we can't recommend this place highly enough.

Only very small (maximum 12 motorhomes), it is set in a garden that once was an orchard.

Apple trees still nestled between the sites, had a good crop of delicious red apples there for the picking, though this short person needed the services of my best friend to reach apples high up on the lower branches 😊

The service provided by the owners was the best by far of all the places we have stayed in and nothing was too much trouble.

They even offered to put my washing on and hang on the line while we went touring.

Tram tickets are organised at reception and they offer money exchange from euros at the best rate we saw anywhere.

Trip into Old Town only takes 10-15 minutes by tram.

Most places in Prague take either euros or Czech Koruna (CZK) which made life very easy.

Even menus in restaurants show both prices and have English translations.

We had three fabulous days in Old Town (Stare Mesto), Lesser Town (Mala Strana), New Town (Nova Mesto) and Castle District (Hradcany).

This area is the largest of any of the cities we have visited to date.

Only our pictures can show how magically different this city is - but again none do it justice.

Prague is one of the most beautiful cities we have seen.

It's uniquely preserved historical centre, a UNESCO World Heritage Site reflects eleven centuries of history.

This culturally rich city is full of fabulous monuments and diverse architecture.

Spires and domes, statues, buildings showcasing fabulous paintings, on the outside as well as inside, parks and gardens and boats filled with tourists travelling up and down the Vitava River - so much to see at every corner.

The main square in Old Town is filled with thousands and thousands of tourists all standing and looking in awe - in every direction - just too much to take in all at once.

Buskers in every corner, horses and carriages (for the romantically inclined), colourful restored antique cars (for the "look at me" tourists) and electric big wheel bikes were among some of the forms of transport offered.

It took a couple of days to stroll down most of the streets which included visits to the Old Town Hall and Astronomical Clock where the 12 apostles appear on the hour; Cathedral of Our Lady before Tyn (another impressive Gothic Cathedral) and St Nicholas Church and too many more to mention.

Thoroughly enjoyed the stroll across Charles Bridge from Old Town to the Castle District - for every tourist a must do to see the rich sculptural decorations and statues at ever few metres along this bridge.

Treated ourselves several times to pub and restaurant stops for a pint or two and the footlong bread rolls with kobasa sausage, sauerkraut and sauce and mustard - yummy!

Also just had to have the local treat here Trdlink which can be eaten on its own or stuffed with ice cream and other sweet things.

It tastes a bit like donuts but is a sweet rolled pastry encrusted with sugar and cooked on a rotisserie.

Certainly a favourite with the local bees who swarm around anyone eating one of these - double yummy and- yes - the weight is getting harder to control.

Cathedral of St Vitus is one of the 10 top cathedrals in the world to visit.

It stands high on the hill in the Prague Castle precinct - just breathtaking, can't find words to describe this Gothic cathedral that took over 600 years to build.

We toured through the Old Royal Palace and St George's Basilica and then down Golden Lane which are a row of small houses built in the castle grounds to house workers and marksmen who defended the castle.

Stayed long enough to see the pomp and ceremony of the changing of the guards at the palace.

The public transit system is really great – very fast and very punctual, however travelling on this type of system in another country where all the signage is in the home country language can be a challenge.

On our first trip into Prague Old Town we were not sure as to which tram stop to get off – we knew it was probably about the sixth stop – when it was about the fifth stop I asked my Navigator if she could see the sign announcing the name of the station – she replied it is Zákaz Kouření.

I smiled and laughed and said no that means “No smoking”. The only reason I knew was because I had looked it up on Google Translate previously.

A fairytale city that could take one a week or more to truly see everything.

Sadly we left on Tuesday morning with a basket full of delicious apples and so many memories.

## **Tuesday 5th September. Czech Republic**

### **Kutna Hora**

Our next stop Kutna Hora - a medieval city about 70 kms from Prague rich in silver ore.

From a distance we saw three huge spires perched high on the hill overlooking the town.

Expected it was near or at Old Town so took Ziggy up the hill and after venturing into Old Town, the roads narrowed and narrowed and soon we opted to find the best spot to turn around before we became sandwiched.

One of the many times we have wished we could bring in the side mirrors.

Found a spot a short way away and set off looking for the three spires.

The information board in Old Town was only in Czech - ugh !!!

We meandered through Old Town into the main square - very quiet compared to Prague - but again witnessed the pride of this town with all old buildings restored and painted.

We saw a bus group heading up the hill so we followed them and at the end were rewarded with coming face to face with the three spires - St Barbara's Cathedral - wow.

It rivals St Vitus in Prague in size and elegance.

Its soaring nave culminates in elegant six petalled ribbed vaults.

The chapels include 15th century frescoes.

This cathedral certainly is the most impressive externally.

There are several other places of interest here and the views across the valley are more than spectacular.

A wine growing region also and local wines can be purchased here.

Time to move on and find a campsite for the night.

### **Jihlava-Stoky - Campsite for tonight: Autokemp Vysocina**

Not a lot of places to choose from and as Czech Republic does not allow wild camping we pulled into this one as it was getting late.

Again misled by the pictures in our APP, this place is not one that is recommended.

A parking area attached to a restaurant (which was not open) and accommodation place for workers (all male) with one WC and shower (with no door) for everyone to share - not good so again opted to use Ziggy for showers and toilet.

We have been experiencing and hearing a growing noise (thought to be wheel bearings) and even though we have had it checked out twice already, Rob is very concerned and eager to find someone who will take his concerns seriously.

### **Wednesday 6th September**

Had a quiet night - not expected with the clientele staying here and left reasonably early.

Spoke to a mechanic in Jihlava about 20kms away who again didn't want to help so headed for the next big town Brno.

### **Brno - Wednesday & Thursday nights 6th & 7th September**

#### **Camp for 2 nights - Motortec, Brno**

Motortec is a Fiat/Alfa Romeo/Maserati sales and service operation and they bent over backwards to help us out.

They advised us not to drive any further and said they would check out the problem.

Looks like the really rough roads we had been driving over in Poland had finally caught us with us and we had done some damage in the front left wheel.

It would take a couple of days to get the parts from Italy but it would be ok to park at the front of their business overnight whilst they waited for parts.

They provided us with a courtesy Fiat car to drive around and see the sights of Brno.

The parts arrived, they fitted them and off we set.

Their service was excellent – fortunately their service manager spoke some English otherwise the task would have been very difficult.

### **Austria**

#### **Friday 8th September - Austria for one night only**

Keen to leave Brno now, even though we did not visit the town - decided to find a quiet country campsite for some R& R.

So relieved as we drove away from Motortec in Brno and soon hit the highway - no noise - Ziggy purred along - we were so relieved that someone took the time to listen to our concerns and more than that saved us from a potentially dangerous situation.

Spent our remaining Czech money at Lidl and soon after passed through the border gates into Austria - no border checkpoint again - travelling through borders in the Schengen area has been seamless.

#### **Bernhardsthal - Austria - Campsite for tonight:**

Just what the doctor ordered - 5 minutes outside this quaint little town, set on lush green grass, green trees everywhere and on a river, a free spot for motorhomes was provided.

Two other motorhomes were already there enjoying the peace and tranquility and Ziggy happily nestled between them.

We sat and bathed in the remaining day's sunshine and talked and laughed about our adventures thus far.

Only 100 metres away, there was a small club house/restaurant where the locals came and went.

Outside the clubhouse, there were two long cement rinks (similar to our bowling greens but cement) where a group of men were playing a game which I think is called "tut put".

They hurled flat bottom pucks about a half meter in diameter with handles on top, along the cement - the aim to get as close to the x marked in a square at the end of the rink.

They played for hours into the night under flood lights.

Have not seen this played before and will do some research on it when next in wifi zone.

The clubhouse had external WC which they offered campers the use of.

We have seen so much and experienced so much - our history and geography lesson continues day by day.

Woke up Saturday morning - again a beautiful but windy day.

This sleepy little town came alive - tractors, bicycles, cars all towing trailers full of branches, all heading in the same direction – this continued for hours, so expect this must have been the towns clean up day.

Ventured into town for a look around - just a little quaint village in the back blocks of Austria - close to the Czech and Slovakian borders.

## Slovakia

### **SLOVAKIA - Saturday 9th & Sunday 10th September**

We passed through the Czech, Austrian and Slovakian borders all within a few kilometres – 3 different countries, 3 different languages, 3 different cultures, 2 different currencies and 2 different Vignettes required for Ziggy

There was one border check where all vehicles were stopped – we had our Passports out but as soon as they saw the 2 old grey heads with GB registration and Aussie stickers we were waved straight through without having to stop – not so for all the other vehicles.

Decided as we were so close to Slovakia we would venture back because we did not see everything we wanted to see when we were here in mid May.

Our trip in Slovakia was cut short when we were called back to Poland to complete another step in getting my passport and citizenship finalised.

### **Bratislava - Camping place for Saturday & Sunday: Parking Danubio**

Very impressed with NAVIE, our new Sat Nav - her instructions are super and so easy to follow.

Bratislava has a population of around half a million, has been the capital of the Slovak Republic since 1993 and part of the European Union since 2004.

Bratislava is divided by the Danube river making the road system a maze of twists and turns around the bridges - a tourist drivers nightmare.

I listened to NAVIE issue at least 10 minutes of instructions without drawing breath and wondered how my driver could follow them all.

All comments on our APPs rate this place highly and we were not disappointed.

A free camping and parking area right on the Danube with views across the river to Old Town and the beautiful castle high on the hill.

There are several motorhomes here so feels very very safe plus Police on foot patrol at night.

Two restaurants on boats moored in the river - are only metres away.

Obviously this is a city visited by the tourist river boats - eg AAPT and from where we sit, there are 4 of these on the other side coming and going.

Night time is spectacular with the castle on the hill and two bridges fully lit as well as the buildings in Old Town.

Visited Old Town on Sunday morning - very quiet compared to Saturday.

Not a huge amount to see compared to what we saw in Prague and easily walked though Old Town in a few hours.

Had a wonderful dinner on one of the restaurant boats (which had its own micro brewery on board) on the "not so blue" Danube.

So pretty at night with all the sparkling lights across the river.

Left Slovakia for probably the last time ever on Monday morning and headed back across the border into Austria - we really loved this little country.

## Austria

### Vienna - Monday 11th September & Tuesday 12th September

Stopped at the border to buy a Vignette (Austrian road toll) and were surprised to see border officials pulling over all cars and trucks.

They were checking all car boots and all vans were required to open cargo doors for inspection.

We fully expected an inspection of Ziggy but the officials just smiled and waved us through without passport or Ziggy checks.

Seems they are not interested in vehicles with GB number plates or maybe the Aussie sticker had something to do with it - then maybe two old folks were of no interest to them.

Now well over 6 months into our travels and no Schengen checks so far.



We had met two German motorhomers in Bratislava who gave us the thumbs up for a place to stay just outside of Vienna so we thought we would try it.

**Our camping spot for two nights: Parking Pillichsdorf 15kms from Vienna**

We are travelling in familiar territory now as we spent some time here on our first European tour in the summer of 1978 (July and August) with my mother's relatives in Eisenstadt (just outside Vienna).

Since then we have had a few other trips here but always during the winter months – 2001 skiing in Saalbach and Hinterglemm, 2002 skiing in Hopfgarten and Soll and 2005 skiing in Obertauern.

Very different now in Summer with the lush green pastures replacing the snow-covered trees and mountains - both very beautiful seasons.

We visited many places in Vienna back in 1978 including Schoenbrunn Castle so did not revisit these places again -(think we had 4 Weiner Schnitzels in 1 day for lunch and dinner with 4 different sets of relatives)

Pillichsdorf is only a very small village and the Stellplatz is provided by the local tennis and sporting club.

It only takes 5 motorhomes and provides all facilities one might need - WC and shower are in the tennis club house and are really great.

They leave a key outside in the meter box - you can have a game of tennis if you want but they do not provide racquets - plenty of balls though.

Only small negative is that you have two trains to catch into Vienna - one little train (station is just across the road) but that connects after only one stop (Obersdorf) to a fast luxurious train that takes you right into Vienna within 30 minutes.

Both trains work on the same timetable so no waiting (note – on the return trip get onto back carriage of fast train so that you can quickly get to small train before it departs - only waits a minute for you so if you get off at the front, you may miss it - we did and had to wait half an hour for next train.

Weather was miserable in the afternoon so opted to take a walk around the little village today and head into the big smoke next morning.

Very little to see in the village but the bikeways are excellent.

Left early to make the most of the day (still miserable) and easily caught the trains right into Vienna Mitte.

There is a huge shopping mall opposite the train station and a city map which also shows the subway systems - available in English from the Information counter.

Also picked up a prepaid SIM card there from the "3" shop which covers all EU countries and can be topped up monthly via Internet.

Spent the whole day walking through this romantic city which is full of every conceivable museum you would ever want to see. - statues, fountains and old architecture mixed with the modern and ultra new.

Some of our favourite spots being Church of St Charles, City Hall and the most amazing St Stephens Cathedral and the wonderful malls in and around here - Stadt Park itself takes a couple of hours to explore.

You could easily spend a week in Vienna and the easiest way to explore it is with the Hop On and Hop Off Buses.

Most major cities have them and whilst we chose to walk it ourselves, we were completely exhausted at the end of the day and welcomed the rattle and hum of the train on the way back.

I think we both fell asleep at different times on the homeward journey but managed to get off at the right station.

Thought about taking the Hop On and Hop Off Buses next day to see anything we missed the previous day.

### **Wednesday 13th September**

Woke up next morning (very late) to a beautiful blue cloudless day but decided to move on and spend more time driving for a few days instead of walking.

Roads are just super here and Ziggy just purrs along.

We are opting to avoid the highways and motorways and pass through many quaint little villages, often stopping along the way for breaks and sightseeing.

We are keen to revisit some of our favourite skiing spots and places we have been to before and heading toward the Danube and the Romantic Road.

### **Ottenschlag**

#### **Our camp for tonight: Parking Ottenschlag**

Set just on the outskirts of this small town, this camp stop borders a forest and a small lake.

It is a Stellplatz run by the community here and a small payment of €5 is requested to be paid at the Town Hall.

No cooking for the chef tonight so we head for town to pay our fee and to find the illusive quaint little bar/restaurant.

It is Wednesday and we find the many eating places closed ("Ruhig Tag" it is known as which means "quiet day") it's their day off. - ugh!.

We pass by the Town Hall which is closed and on our way home, the alluring smell of food hits the nostrils and like the Pied Piper we are drawn to the castle grounds where the smells seem to be coming from.

Part of the ground floor of the castle has been transformed to a bar and restaurant with so much character - dimly lit bar with stone walls, Austrian artefacts and pictures in every little nook and cranny.

"Heuringer Im Schloss" is the name and run by Helga Wimmer.

We ordered two beers (in German) and Helga speaks back to us in English!!! - didn't know our German was that bad.

Had a really great conversation with her and talked about a soup my mother used to make - Griessknodelsuppe.

It wasn't on the menu but chef made it for us - how good is that.

Got to say it wasn't as good as mums but really special that they made it for me.

The place was packed and every man and his dog (yes dogs are allowed in everywhere in Europe) came in - had a great night.

## [Melk](#)

### **Thursday 14th September**

We are now in very familiar territory, places we have been to before and just had to stop again to revisit for nostalgia.

Followed the "Not so blue Danube" through picture perfect countryside with little alpine villages popping up at every corner.

Came around a corner and right in front of us was the Melk Abbey. We visited this in 2001 but in the winter when everything was white and not green.

The abbey is one of the biggest and most beautiful European baroque monasteries and is one of Austria's most visited art-historical sites.

The Benedictine monks still live and work in the abbey.

It still has prayer services on Sundays but mostly now a tourist attraction with museum, exhibitions and the stunning gardens - it is perched high on the hill overlooking the town and of course the Danube.

### **Our camp for tonight: Abadja de Melk, Melk,**

Parked Ziggy in the last motorhome spot (right on the Danube).

The fee of €6 covered us for an overnight stop (bonus as we only wanted to stay for a few hours).

Headed into Melk Old Town, only very small but lots of character then up to the Abbey but our trip was cut short as the black sky and thunder clouds overhead threatened the start of a serious storm so we scampered back to Ziggy at a fast rate of knots and sat and watched the storm pass overhead.

### **Friday 15th September**

Temperature dropped considerably overnight after the storm, so was difficult to get started early - can't believe summer is over so quickly.

Really sorry we didn't buy those warm slippers in Poland when we got the chance - will definitely have to invest in some warm woolly boots VERY SOON!

Went for a long walk across a bridge to the other side of the Danube where there were several river cruise boats moored.

Melk Abbey is one of the stops along the Danube for these cruise boats.

Again we kept away from the motorways and spent time in the smaller villages along the way.

Stopped in at a place called Ybbs (spelt correctly) where there was supposed to be a camp spot on the Danube adjacent to a grassy riverbank, but when we arrived, there were signs up everywhere prohibiting motorhomes.

We stopped illegally for an hour or so and had lunch and then moved on. Shame they missed out on the millions we were going to spend in that town!

### [Aschbach Markt](#)

#### **Our camp for tonight: Stellplatz Edbauer, Aschbach Markt**

Further into rural Austria we travelled, just breathtaking scenery all the way and arrived at a farm just 7kms outside of Aschbach Markt. Corn fields and fruit trees everywhere.

This little place allows for only a few motorhomes but the setting is just magic.

A private house with manicured lawns for the motorhomes to park on.

Apple and pear trees scattered around everywhere ripe with fruit and a vegetable and herb patch right beside us.

The facilities are first class and the farmer leaves you to roam about the gardens and lawns. There is no fee as such but they ask for a small donation to cover costs.

### **Saturday 16th & Sunday 17th September**

Now deep into the ski areas and mountains, we came across some beautiful lakes. It has been raining all day, so no opportunity to take photos today.

Had planned to stay at Traunsee at Ebensee but when we arrived, the motorhome pitches were boggy and the fog was so thick, we couldn't see any more than a few feet into the lake.

Decided we didn't want to stay here until the weather cleared.

Checked our APP and found another campsite around 7kms away - up the mountain.

### [Ebensee](#)

#### **Our camp for tonight: Parking Langbathsee, Ebensee**

What a gem. A really windy road but so picturesque with waterfalls cascading down beside the road - shame about the fog and rain but still amazing nonetheless.

The mixed carpark at the top is the start of many walks in and around Langbathsee.

A large beautiful mountain lake with thick forests bordering the walking tracks and white sandy beaches.

The shortest track is a brisk 50 minute walk with others extending to 4-5 hours.

When we arrived there were people setting up marquees and what looked like the finish post for a marathon race.

A bit reluctant to stay here but after speaking to one of the workers found out that the following day (Sunday) was a fun day and running marathon day for the locals.

He said we were welcome to stay and enjoy the festivities.

Settled in for the evening and after all the workers left, there was just the three of us (Ziggy, her driver and navigator) to enjoy the peace and quiet of nature (the rain) for the rest of the evening.

Next morning, bright and early, the cars rolled in with food, drink and people.

This carpark and the one adjacent to the restaurant here was packed to the brim and so was the road coming up the mountain.

The rain continued to fall, though not as heavily as the day before.

We sat in the front seat and watched the races to begin with and then joined the crowds at the finish post.

The first race with toddlers holding the hands of their excited parents, dragging them to the finish line and then the joy when all received the coloured balloon of their choice and a medal.

Brought back memories of not so long ago when we participated in a similar fun day with our grandkids.

All ages raced with the final race being a half marathon around the lake.

Really enjoyed the day's activities but then we were so wet and cold we retreated to our Ziggy bus to warm up.

Shame the rain spoiled the day for so many, the end result being many leaving earlier than they might have.

Apart from a few couples going to the restaurant in the evening, we were the only ones left after 9pm.

### **Monday 18th September**

Light rain fell during the night but woke up to a sky with small patches of blue.

On with the walking shoes for a power walk around the lake.

Several locals had also arrived to enjoy the walking tracks (most with their four legged friends).

Temperatures during the last two nights had fallen to single figures but with the sun peeking out for a minute or two occasionally, it soon warmed up a little.

Returned back to Traunsee am Ebensee to see the view we missed out on a couple of days before. Like something out of a travel video, the view was spectacular.

Two gems in Ebensee Paradise and we were lucky enough to experience and see both.

Again our planned stop for the night changed as we were informed by NAVIE that the highway to this destination was closed.

The alternative route put on another 70kms and took us in a direction we did not want to travel. It took an hour before we realised this so had to double back.

### [Bad Ischl](#)

#### **Our camp for tonight: Parking Kaiservilla, Bad Ischl**

Back on track now, we stopped here for the night.

Bad Ischl as we saw it in winter many years ago, is very different now - a thriving tourist town even in the non winter months.

The parking place is in the centre of town so did not take long to venture out and explore the village. Remarkably quiet considering the location.

#### **Tuesday 19th & Wednesday 20th September**

Travelled through more rain today so decided to take the motorway.

Low cloud at times caused a few issues with visibility.

We have been climbing quite rapidly and the scenery continues to be spectacular.

### [Altenmarkt Im Pongau](#)

#### **Our camp for 2 nights: Kellerbauer Wohnmobile Site, Altenmarkt Im Pongau**

This place is highly rated and only a short km from centre of Altenmarkt - a rural setting with great facilities, though no shower which is not a problem with us as we prefer to shower in Ziggy. Internet was excellent.

Decided to stay until the rain cleared as we are keen to put another tick against our bucket list and hit the Grossglockner high alpine road but only on a fine day with good visibility.

Had a huge dump of snow on surrounding mountains overnight so the temperatures came down to single figures.

Have not been connected to electricity to fully top up the batteries for over 3 weeks now but the cold snap caused some concern with our batteries so opted to use electricity on night two to give the batteries a good deep charge.

Ziggy's electronics panel gave us a warning and on checking the manual were informed that it is normal to get this type of warning if the batteries have not been fully charged in the last 20 days.

They have lovely fresh farm eggs and wine (either red or white) one of each to choose from so bought a bottle of the house red - 1 ltr for the huge sum of €4.

Was very young but no sharp edges - didn't buy a second bottle to take with us!!!!

Still think New Zealand Marlborough Sauvignon Blancs are some of the best whites anywhere in the world and are finding it difficult to find reds here that we really like.

Tried to make friends with the local pet black rabbit (scared as a rabbit) and tried to feed the pet pig - blind in one eye.

He ran into Ziggy a couple of times and refused to eat the lettuce and carrot we offered him but he did scare the old lady in the Moho next to us - who ran when he blindly made advances in her direction.

Took time out on day two to visit downtown (took Ziggy for a run as the weather was horrid).

Really great little town - bought two pairs of warm outdoor/snow boots - one for driver and one for the navigator.

Forgot to pack these in Oz and have been suffering with cold feet for a while now.

Still looking for the illusive pair of slippers for indoors - don't have a KMart or Target here so have not been able to find reasonable pair for under \$100.

Still angry we didn't buy these in Poland.

### [Grossglockner High Alpine Road](#)

#### **Thursday 21st September**

Still raining when we left, however, the long range forecast for Grossglockner was some sun on Friday and Saturday so opted to get as close as possible until the weather cleared.

Bought a new vignette as ours ran out today - another 10 days in Austria - crying shame - just love it here.

Arrived in town of Bruck at the northern end of Grossglockner and weather was just clearing.

Decided to head towards the toll gates at the start of the road for more information - only a few kms away.

There is a huge carpark at the entry where fellow travellers have parked for the night so hoped to stay there for the night.

Because of the huge dump of snow the night before, the pass had been closed but reopened just before we got there.

With the help and information of the beautiful lady at the info counter, we decided to take a day ticket for €35 and do the road today.

The road is only 48kms long and for a day pass you can do it as many times as you want.

We left from the northern end with the hope of being able to get to the bottom and return in the same day.

We took advantage of so many places along the way to stop and take photos and extended the trip by going to Franz Josef Glacier along the way - really, really worth the extra mileage.

Words and photos can't explain the beauty of this region.

The numerous hairpin bends left the driver totally focused on getting us around each corner whilst I enjoyed the view through the eye of the camera - absolutely stunning!.

So much snow the night before kept the snow ploughs busy and they were still operating on different parts of the pass during our adventure.

A white snowy fairy wonderland, mile after mile - the camera just didn't stop trying to capture every moment.

We didn't have enough time to do the return trip today, so found a great stop for the night just outside the southern end of the Grossglockner toll gates.

A return trip on any consecutive day is only €11 or you can take a monthly pass for €55.

They certainly get you for the day pass only but it is really so worth it.

### [Mortschach](#)

#### ***Our campsite for the night: Gasthaus Schwaiger - Mortschach***

Half way between the toll gates and Lienz, we stopped at this Gasthaus.

There is no cost to stay in the carpark which allows for 4 motorhomes.

Really great little place so just had to have a night off cooking - great menu at a very reasonable price.

So much food, we waddled back to Ziggy and sadly went to bed on a full stomach - very uncomfortable and really bad for the waistline - disappearing quickly now!!!!

#### **Friday 22nd September**

Had to fill up on auto gas so continued down to Lienz.

Not many spots in Austria to get auto gas and they are hard to find as not available in most service stations.

Straight back up the mountain and back through the toll gates to do a south to north run at Grossglockner.

The beautiful lady at the northern end of the pass informed us of an Oldtimers Car Race being held late afternoon today.



A large section of this road would be closed from 3.30 to 5.30 pm so we were eager to find a good viewing area to watch the race before the crowds arrived.

Certainly steeper going up from south to north but both ways were just as spectacular.

South to north necessitated a lot of second gear driving whilst north to south required much engine braking to give the brakes a breather.

Perfect blue skies today and we were just so pleased we opted to stay the extra day.

Stopped at the finish line at the top of the pass and parked Ziggy so we had a full view of all the cars coming toward the finish line and a good section of hairpin bends.

Massive carpark and restaurant here and it filled up quickly.

There were 65 cars due to start including the following marques :- Bugatti, Lagonda, Alvis, Bentley, Marmon, Veritas, Borgward, MG, and of course my favourite marque – Porsche as well as many others.

There were also 2 Audi Auto Union 2 silver arrows one of which had a 16 cylinders rear mounted engine with dual rear wheels.

Moved out of Ziggy to get a better viewing point and sat in our deck chairs rugged up in three layers - plus coats, beanies, gloves and rugs - it was so cold out there.

The closer to the start of the race, the colder it got as the blue skies disappeared and the clouds came over and then the wind.

Everyone braved the cold to see the race but quickly left when the roads re opened to allow us all to get back down the mountain.

### Saalfelden

#### **Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> September Our campsite for tonight: Fritzbauer - Saalfelden**

Around 25kms from Grossglockner to this little farm Stellplatz - the farmers wife was just delightful and not long after we met the farmer - he certainly was a real character.

Only a small Stellplatz but for €12 it included electricity so again took advantage to give batteries a boost.

Parking areas were mainly grass and given the amount of rain we have had over the last week, we were reluctant to park here.

The farmer agreed we could park next to the barn on gravel.

#### **Saturday 23rd September & Sunday 24th September**

Woke up to the sounds of cattle mooing, donkey braying, and roosters crowing!!! Didn't realise that we were parked next to the animal shed - chuckle, chuckle.

This was a real farm and upon opening the door got a strong whiff of fresh air strongly perfumed with bovine essence - nothing like country fresh air.

Walked into the shed to have a look and there were at least 15 cows and one very vocal donkey in there.

Often wondered why they had such large sheds attached to their very large houses in these villages - now understand that animals need a place to stay during the colder months and at night.

Passed through so many areas where we have skied - so many memories.

The beautiful town of Zell Am See- one of our favourite spots.

They certainly have grown over the years and are packed even now before the start of the real ski season.

Don't believe there is a low season here as the ski resort camp spots are really expensive compared to the country spots.

We have met many people in our travels and when asked which country is their favourite - 90% say either Austria or Norway.

During some of our late at night discussions, we too have agreed that Austria is a place we could happily live in (apart from home that is).

Both our daughters want to come to Europe early next year to see us and we think Austria might be the place to catch up and do some skiing - so many beautiful places, it will be hard to make a final decision.

### [Neukirchen am Grossvenediger](#)

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Panorama Gasthof Freiedburg, Neukirchen am Grossvenediger**

Saw this one in the Parkings APP and just had to come here - the view is more than spectacular.

Perched high on the mountain, it overlooks snow-capped mountains and beautiful valleys.

Saw hang gliders soaring over the mountains - counted 20 at one time.

Colourful chutes passing through fluffy white clouds, up and down they went carried by the thermal currents - what a buzz it would be.

The Gasthof itself is really quaint with a dining area inside and outside (when weather is warmer) overlooking this beautiful view.

The cost is only €8 per night but a discount of €5 is offered if you have dinner in the restaurant.

Ziggy is perched in the front row and in our deck chairs we sit and take in this amazing view until the sun goes over the mountain.

Then inside in the front seats with a hot toddy until dinner time where we just had to check out the view from the restaurant - another free night for the cook.

Rained during the night so our thoughts of staying on and doing some of the mountain walks diminished somewhat. Best wait till morning to make that decision.

Not a good looking day and damp underfoot but rain has stopped.

Weather seems to brighten as the days go on so hoped this would be the case.

Had a late breakfast/brunch and headed off for the walk early afternoon.

Over 3kms - all a steep downhill run - what a breeze!!

Passed fields with sheep, goats and cows - with bells on - sounded like a small orchestra played with cow bells or was it the Hari Krishna - quite cute.

Stopped for a break for coffee and resisted the numerous fabulous cakes begging to be consumed.

The hike uphill took five times as long as the downhill run - should have had the cake - certainly would have worked off all those calories.

Dropped two layers of clothing on the way up and probably a thousand calories but walking through the forest was so green, fresh and invigorating.

Quiet night I think, and hopefully no aching bones in the morning.

### **Monday 25th September**

No aching bones this morning which was a surprise.

The roads are so wonderful, it is a pleasure driving.

With Autumn here now, the forests have changed from emerald green to all the Autumn shades of golden, orange, pink red and brown.

We are only travelling short distances now, as there is so much to see here.

Every little village is just so beautiful and we stop at many along the way.

### **Kufstein**

#### **Our campsite for the night: Womo Stellplatz Fischergraben, Kufstein**

Kufstein is on the border between Austria and Germany and we crossed into Germany to do some last minute shopping before parking back in Austria for the night.

Dropped into Lidl and have to say this is the cheapest Lidl we have been to for wines and spirits.

Our favourite Marlborough Sauv Blanc has been around \$10 everywhere else but here only \$6. Captain Morgan rum 700ml \$7.50 - can you believe it.

Needless to say we bought heaps of alcohol and a little food 😊.

The campsite is in a very large carpark attached to a massive sporting complex with sporting fields all around.

Only a small area dedicated for motorhomes.

There were no spots available at first so we patiently waited until we could squeeze into a spot.

The area was well away from the sports complex so had a really enjoyable quiet evening.

### **Tuesday 26th September**

Took a walk across the bridge and along the riverbank to the town centre.

A very small old town which we wandered into and enjoyed a cuppa.

Found a pair of slippers in a local shop that did not cost the earth.

Not what I would buy at home, but no one is here to laugh at them.

None for the driver yet and we were even thinking of getting a larger size like mine but unfortunately did not have any large enough.

He looked like one of the three sisters in Cinderella trying to squeeze into the golden slipper!

Headed off again mid morning and stopped in Hopfgarten and Soll - two of our favourite skiing towns on past trips.

Soll is just so beautiful and the gondola is already operating, though there was no snow on this side of the mountain.

The Gasthaus we stayed in at Hopfgarten has been demolished and replaced with a massive apartment complex - such a shame but that's progress.

### **Schwaz**

#### **Our campsite for the night: Koenigveldplatz, Schwaz**

Again a mixed parking Stellplatz with spaces for around 10 motorhomes.

Just across the bridge again from the centre of the village, a very quiet area with views across paddocks to the mountains.

Made some friends with our MoHo neighbours - one from Sweden and the other a local Austrian man on his own.

Really enjoyed their company and shared many travel experiences with them.

The Austrian chap gave us a present – a handmade candle mounted on a marble stone from the local area – what a lovely thought.

Schwaz also has an old town and a beautiful church at the end of it - set on the side of a hill, we walked up and up and took in the beautiful views before coming back down to Old Town and then back home for another quiet night.

### **Germany**

### **Wednesday 27th and Thursday 28th September**

We are planning to meet up with fellow Australian travellers, Michael and Pam who are currently in Austria on their fourth trip in their Hymer and so we are now headed towards Innsbruck to find a good overnight site.

Found a campsite in Innsbruck which was very busy but quickly decided we did not want to stay here - prefer the country so set off again after some lunch.

Had planned to get fuel in Innsbruck but forgot and soon we were on the motorway where prices are regularly .3 Euro (45 cents) a litre dearer.

We climbed higher and higher through some unbelievably magnificent scenery but were concerned when the Low Fuel light came on.

Got stuck behind a tractor going uphill for quite a few Kms and felt the pressure mounting as going uphill in Ziggy in second gear chews up fuel quickly.

Finally got to the top and breathed a sigh of relief as we headed downhill topped up with fuel and Ziggy happily continued on.

### **Mittenwald**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Karwendel, Mittenwald - Germany**

Crossed the border from Austria in to Germany, though you wouldn't know it.

Had heard that Germany had stepped up border patrols and were no longer allowing refugees in - no sign of a border patrol on this secondary road here though.

Wow, Mittenwald is the most amazing little village set at the bottom of a mountain with the second highest mountain cable car lift in Germany just a short walk away.

The Stellplatz allows for 20 Motorhomes and was quite full with only a couple of spots available.

We had passed through the village on the way to the Stellplatz and couldn't wait to explore it.

The prettiest village we have come to so far - difficult to describe.

The facades of many of the village houses are decorated with murals dating back to the 18th century.

Most of the colourful and artistic frescoes are based on biblical themes.

Every house looked new, fresh and colourful.

Dropped into the tourist office and picked up some brochures.

There are some fabulous walks at the top of the mountains to explore - maybe tomorrow.

Did our favourite thing after a long walk - stopped in the village, had a beer and watched the passing tourist traffic before heading home for a well deserved rest.

Saved a spot next to Ziggy for Michael and Pam who were arriving lunchtime so took the time to catch up on emails, pay bills and upload some blog info.

Internet has been woeful in Austria - so slow - and chewing up the GBs as if they were MBs.

Think the Govt here must have shares (or own) the internet companies.

A short half hour on the web just sending emails and doing some research took up about 3GBs.

Think we might run out of our 10 GBs before the end of the month.

Michael and Pam arrived after lunch and the hours just rushed by with copious glasses of wine consumed, travelling stories exchanged with much laughter and finally a break to show them this most beautiful town.

Back for a BBQ and a bottle of well aged champagne (Pam had been waiting four years to drink this with someone - luckily me) and more wine, liqueurs and finishing with chocolates.

Just such a fabulous night with a parting promise to work off the calories tomorrow with some exercise.

No headaches, or hangovers next morning but not an early start!

### **Friday 29th September**

We met with Michael and Pam again in the morning, donned some cold weather gear and hiking boots and headed towards the cable car.

Where we stayed overnight was only 930 metres above sea level with no snow at this time of the year, however, the top of the cable car is 2244 metres with snow and then on the hiking trails heights of over 2350 metres are reached.

The views from the top are great and get better the further up the hiking trails you climb.

Michael and Pam both had Nordic walking sticks and were able to manage the more difficult sections much better than Krys and I without the sticks so I think we may be purchasing some sticks before future walks.

We reluctantly descended back to our Hymers, said our goodbyes and headed off in different directions.

We headed off towards Blaichach to catch up with our Dutch friends whom we met at the Polish campsite "Bumerang" in the first four weeks of this trip - Marie-Louise and Robert.

They are also regular motorhome travellers and have been communicating regularly with us.

Again the motorways were smooth and easy driving and we look in awe at the colourful Autumn landscapes around every corner.

Leaves dropping by the thousands with each gust of wind.

The streets and paddocks covered with thousands of leaves of every colour and the trees now becoming barer each day as we head towards winter.

### Blaichach

#### **Our campsite for the night: Alpen-Rundblick - Blaichach**

Marie-Louise and Rob arrived late afternoon after visiting Oberstdorf nearby to get tickets for the German Ice Skating dance competitions on Saturday and Sunday.

Travelling with them were Kazik and Jola who are the co owners of "Bumerang".

They were travelling in Spain when we visited Bumerang and it was great to meet with them this time.

Too much laughter and way too many vodkas (home brew moonshine with raspberries to make it healthy! ).

Didn't realise how strong they were until we stood up and headed back on unsteady feet.

Very popular campsite with the locals but quite expensive as apart from the 17€ per night fee, everything was extra including WC, shower and of course electricity.

Lovely views across to the mountains and takes around 50 motorhomes.

Don't think we would have been very popular with our neighbours as we partied on till around midnight.

It was a very interesting conversation as Marie-Louise and Robert are Dutch but have been living in Poland for quite a few years and Kazik and Jola are Polish but we were all speaking in German with Marie-Louise and Robert helping out with the translations when our German let us down, which seemed to increase the more moonshine we had.

### **Saturday 30th September**

Now slowly heading north west back towards the UK as we are required to be back there before late November for our MOT, our vehicle annual inspection.

Our bike cover is now nearly in tatters and we have been looking for a new cover since we left Poland.

There are not many motorhomes in Poland and it was very difficult to find any motorhome dealers there.

Austria had dealers but only stocked the Fiamma bike cover which only lasted us a couple of months before the zip failed - very inferior zips and material.

We saw a massive motorhome dealership in the distance and hurrah found the cover we had been trying to find - and there was only one in stock.

The staff could not speak English but assured us it was the one for our bike racks. We were just so happy!!!

### Ummendorff

#### **Our campsite for the night: Brauhaus Ummendorff**

Great little spot in a small town at the back of a boutique brewery and on a waterway with mother duck and the whole family eager to eat some of the bread we were offering.

Free campsite with no requirement to have a meal.

One of those rare magic days, so we happily discarded the old bike cover and put it in the bin.

The bikes came off and we set off through town to the bikeway and travelled about 16 km through little villages and lots of farmland.

Dark clouds started to appear over the horizon so headed back.

The couple of hours biking were wonderful with not too many hills to climb.

Attached to the brewery is the Brauhaus restaurant and bar.

Had to reward ourselves with a pint of the local stuff in the beer garden and were entertained by a group of young men (beginning part of a bucks party).

The rain made everyone in the beer garden duck for cover.

Finished the evening with their homemade goulash soup (mmm very tasty) before making a dash to Ziggy.

The christening of the new bike cover would have to wait till morning.

#### **Sunday, Monday & Tuesday 1st - 3rd October**

It didn't take us long to work out that no way was this bike cover going to fit the bikes and the Fiamma bike racks.

We did not try to fit it at the shop as we were double parked and too eager to move away - our big mistake.

Cost around €50 and was too far to go back now - double ough!!! - lesson learned.

Packed up the bike cover - typical problem now - how do you fold something large, neatly and have it fit back in the small box it came in?

Took about an hour and eventually looked like it had never been taken out of the box.

### Bad Waldsee

#### **Campsite for 3 nights: Waldsee-Therme, Bad Waldsee**

Arrived mid afternoon in the home town of Erwin Hymer of Hymer Motorhome fame . Hymers everywhere.



We had visited the Hymer showroom on the way in but couldn't get a park anywhere near it. Decided to visit it tomorrow.

Parked Ziggy in one of the largest pitches we had come across. Enough room for two motorhomes.

There were 50 spots but sure you could double that number there was so much room.

Really well laid out and very popular - only a couple of places left when we arrived just after lunch.

Went off to pay at the parking machine and came back to a grinning, pointing Rob - almost directly across from us, Michael and Pam's motorhome was parked.

Had no idea they were coming here and they were as surprised as we were when they returned from the Waldsee Therme Resort - another big night ahead, we think.

Germany has many of these resorts and they are so popular.

We have been told about these firstly from Alison and Alan who we met in Tallinn and now from Michael and Pam.

Totally a la natural – clothes optional - lots of pools hot and cold, spas, saunas etc etc.

Have heard they are just so good and therapeutic, but still not convinced, though I am sure the health possibilities have been covered???

Went for a walk into town as we had plans of leaving here in the morning and visiting the Hymer Museum and then the showroom to look at the latest Hyimers on the market and then moving on.

The town is set between two waterways and again really interesting buildings.

The church is another masterpiece and the cemetery is amazing with beautiful trees and hedges between the graves.

At first thought this was just a park but really worth a walk through.

Arrived back and soon joined Michael and Pam for another great night.

Discovered we had travelled to many of the same places, so never stopped to draw breath.

They had to leave early next morning, so we said our goodbyes.

Checked out reasonably early next morning and headed to the Hymer showroom.

Again could not get anywhere near it.

Sadly most of the customer parking is taken up with second hand motorhomes (probably trade ins) that Hymer are selling so only a couple of spots available.

Went to the Hymer Museum with a view to coming back later.

Really interesting, with three floors of vintage cars and vintage caravans and motorhomes from all around the world.

Really well done and for only a few dollars - spent a couple of hours there and then headed back to the showroom.

Movera (owned by Hymer) sells caravan, camping and motorhome accessories, so we took our newly repackaged bike cover into the store and tried to exchange it for the more expensive alternative plus pay an extra 25 Euro.

The building could have been demolished, a bomb could have gone off, but there was no way this not so friendly shop assistant would help us.

Take it back to the place you bought it - was the only option she gave, even though they carry the same brand at the same price with the same product code.

They did however offer that we try to fit the replacement one in the carpark before purchasing.

End of story, we bought the new one after taking about two hours and doing a degree in "brochure reading in German" to try to fit it.

We have now bought 3 bike covers in 7 months – 1 demolished, 1 that doesn't fit and one that does fit!

Too late now to head out of town so we go back to the same Stellplatz in Bad Waldsee.

Being a long weekend in Germany, the Stellplatz was full as expected.

We decided to wait, it was late and we didn't want to travel at night so we parked at the entry and ate our very, very, late lunch.

Other motorhomes came and parked behind us - all with the same thought.

Our angels in disguise, Rolf and Agnes (Germans from near Düsseldorf) came over and told us, that they and their neighbours would move and make room for us - three motorhomes in a space for two – what a lovely gesture.

When we settled, we took over a bottle of NZ Marlborough Sav Blanc and then sat and talked for hours.

We talked about both of our many adventures and the bike covers and long story short, they had been looking for a cover for their bikes, so we opened our repackaged box and fitted the cover. A perfect fit!

They happily bought it and everyone was happy.

They are travelling to Spain early next year so we hope to catch up with them there.

Thank you so very much, Rolf and Agnes for helping us out.

It was raining next morning and as it was a public holiday, we decided to stay for another day - so we said our goodbyes and moved Ziggy to another spot.

Weather began to clear so we spent another few hours walking and exploring and finishing in the town centre with an ice cream for me and a pint for Rob.

### **Wednesday 4th & Thursday 5th October**

#### **Dietingen/Rottweil**

Weather has not been good for a few days now. Some rain during most days and it is getting colder each day.

Can understand why many Stellplatz close at end of September. Maximum does not go above mid teens now and minimum most nights is single figures.

Our Doona is really warm and cosy so nights are not yet a problem, though might invest in flannelette sheets soon. Still looking for slippers for Rob.

Gas heating works a charm so the odd blast of hot air is really appreciated from time to time to warm things up quickly.

#### ***Our campsite for two nights: Reisemobilpark Turm & Kristelle, Dietingen/Rottweil***

With one of the highways closed near our destination, NAVIE took us right through the middle of Rottweil. The centre of town is a real picture.

The camera came out and happily snapped whenever we could to capture the wonderfully colourful and restored historic buildings.

Just outside Rottweil stands the 246m high ThyssenKrupp Tower, Germany's highest observation deck - currently under refurbishment so could not take the lift to the top.

Dietingen is only 3 kms away from Rottweil with a wide bikeway between the two towns.

The Stellplatz is only a short walk to the small town and houses the mineral and Fossils Museum "World of Crystals" at one end.

Really well set up Stellplatz in a rural setting. Museum is only open a couple of days a week and only for a couple of hours.

The Internet speed was excellent (has been hard to find anywhere) so took advantage whilst it was raining.

Really quaint little town with well kept large homes, a church and a couple of businesses. Pretty much an outer suburb of Rottweil.

It was bitterly cold and the wind was so strong we opted not to do the bike ride into Rottweil.

### **Friday 6th October & Saturday 7th October**

Still wet and cold when we left and drove most of the way through rain squalls.

Traffic was horrendous with roadworks and stop start traffic particularly through the main towns. Should have taken no more than two hours but took more than three.

What a find this place is.

### Dierbach

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Weingut/Weinstube Geiger, Dierbach**

Just on the outskirts of this little village, set behind a Winery, there are five level terraces with large spots overlooking acres and acres of vineyards.

For €10 per night you got a coupon to the value of €4 to spend on wine or food in the restaurant which is only open on Friday and Saturday nights, free electricity and water and grey and black water disposal.

Internet is also free but you can only get this on the first and second level terraces which were fully booked out by a group.

Sat in the bar and did some wine tasting during the afternoon.

Wine cost was so inexpensive and the quality was excellent.

A really good white priced at €3 for a one litre bottle and a little more for a great red. Several to choose from to suit all taste buds.

Though our cellar was really full, we bought 6 of each and a couple of their cream coffee liqueurs for €9.

Just had to have dinner there as well - a real hoot.

Restaurant opened at 6pm and was fully booked out by 6.05pm.

Best guess around 80 Germans, eating, drinking and singing in their best voices accompanied by two piano accordions.

Dinner was traditional German cuisine with most dishes made of pork, roast potatoes and of course sauerkraut - even The Driver ate the sauerkraut.

I think we left around 10pm and the place was still packed.

Ventured into the small town for a walk mid morning.

Lots of other places in town offering wine tasting but very little else apart from homes, some accommodation, a town hall and sporting field.

Came back for lunch but soon after the rain came down again so the bike ride through the vineyards was postponed.

Took the opportunity to do some long needed washing and housework but enjoyed the tranquility and picturesque view of the long lines of grape vines spreading out over the hills in front and to the side of us.

Had such a good time last night, just had to go back to restaurant again.

Walked across at 6.00pm only to see two buses parked outside.

You guessed it- not a spare inch inside.

Sadly headed back to Ziggy, opened up a bottle of our best white, turned on the iPod and conjured up a good curry - had a great night and thought about going across later to have a glass of wine - the rain came down again so that was the end of that.

Next morning our wine was delivered to our door by a little red truck (Door to door delivery) how good is that! - packed up and left in the rain.

Definitely highly recommended, particularly on weekends - but be in the bar before 6pm to get a seat.

### **Sunday, 8th October**

Heading towards the Rhine Valley now.

Our angels from Waldsee Therme - Rolf and Agnes, highly recommended doing the right side of the Rhine heading toward The Netherlands - most picturesque they said.

So we are headed in this direction.

Still drizzling today but from experience, the weather patterns change many times during the day.

### **Bad Schonborn**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: WellMobilPark, Bad Schonborn**

An interim stop only and apart from the Therme nothing this town has to offer in the form of interest or architecture.

Spent a couple of hours wandering around the town with very little open.

Had the worst hot chocolate and coffee in a little bakery/cafe where all the locals were eating massive slices of yummy looking but unhealthy cakes and sweets.

Had an argument with the camping fuhrer (everybody is some sort of fuhrer here) such a bad word - conjures up images of Hitler for me.

Purchased a 24 hour Internet connection for 1 euro which we thought was great value.

Our first mistake was to check on the iPhone to make sure it worked then logged out and tried to connect to the iPad.

Fuhrer omitted to tell us that the password worked on one device only and was not interchangeable.

Long story short after a heated discussion, they gave us another password and we happily connected to the computer and used massive amounts of Internet for the rest of this miserable rainy day.

### **Monday 9th October**

Definitely needed to find something special today as the last 24 hours we have travelled through a lot of industrial areas with not much to see.

## Bacharach am Rhein

### **Our campsite for tonight: Reismobilstellplatz, Bacharach am Rhein**

One campsite was front row on the Rhine but was packed quite early.

Seems like the locals are still out in full force with most motorhomes having German number plates.

Too cold to go riding as again overcast and windy so headed into the small village.

Named the Medieval Village, it did not take long to see why - the buildings were just so unbelievably old (but beautifully restored old).

Very busy touristy area but really special and a must to visit.

The bricked arches with medieval towers atop were at each entry point to the town.

Behind arches were narrow cobbled streets with amazing old structures and vineyards climbing from there to the steep hills above.

The obligatory castle overlooking all of this - such an amazing place.

### **Tuesday 10th October**

So much to see and so many fairytale towns along both sides of the Rhine.

Castle after castle perched high on the hills overlooking these towns and vineyards in between.

Couldn't get into Koblenz as it was fully packed out.

Only a small Stellplatz for 10 motorhomes but ideally located to sightsee Koblenz.

Have very fond memories of Koblenz from previous trip and the town has grown substantially. Such a shame we couldn't get in there.

## Lahnstein/Koblenz

### **Our campsite for tonight: Kranchen, Lahnstein/Koblenz**

Drove a few kms out of Koblenz and found this great campsite right on the Rhine River.

Magic spot with only a bikeway and green lawn down to the river.

The view across the Rhine is of a pretty little town which is overlooked by a fairytale castle.

The Rhine is busy all day with river cruise boats and barges - the height of activity.

The hills adorned with rows and rows of vineyards now changing colour to the Autumn shades.

Would have been absolutely wonderful to have some sun but again a dreary overcast day.

Headed for the bikeway and travelled for around 25kms along the river.

The bikeways are littered with Autumn leaves and the scenery along the way just so special.

Finding it hard to get enough practice on the bikes - too long between rides so I feel like a beginner each time.

Doesn't bother the locals who seem to go out in all conditions.

Bike riding is a way of life here and I am so jealous of the confidence these people have on the bikes even riding on busy one lane roads.

Highly recommended spot if you can't get into Koblenz.

### **Wednesday 11th October and Thursday 12th October**

Travelled along the Rhine forever - village after village and castle after castle each worthy of several photos.

Decided to move away from the Rhine and head toward the Moselle River.

There were so many camping spots along the way to choose from and all are directly waterfront with so many priced at a small 7-10 euros - it was difficult to make a choice.

### **Reil**

### **Our campsite for two nights: Moselufer, Reil**

Beautiful spot again right on the river - extremely busy with mostly German motorhomes.

It is quite amazing to see other people's reactions to a motorhome with GB number plates.

Sometimes feel like we have two heads the way that they stare at us and we are ignored until they learn we are from Australia – their attitude towards us then seems to change.

We have now been challenged 3 times about Brexit until we tell people we are from Australia not the UK.

Walked through town in the afternoon.

Very hilly with narrow cobble stoned streets.

Most people in this region are wine makers or associated with them so there are many wine houses or wine stuhbles as they are called here all eager to sell you their wines.

The waterfront streets were extremely busy with walkers and bikers and many places to stop and eat or drink or just enjoy the view.

Along came a tractor pulling a passenger cart with about 8 people sitting at white clothed tables sightseeing and wine tasting in the cart as they moved along - couldn't believe it and just wanted to capture this on film but just too slow.

At the entry to the campsite, there was a small cafe open all hours and was the meeting point for the large number of motorhomers in the camp.

Great place to get local knowledge.

Took advantage of a reasonable day and headed off on the bikes.

The bikeways were excellent and took us through many vineyards and villages - just what we were looking for.

Stopped along the way and watched as the grape pickers carried large buckets up and down the steep hills to the sorters who stood on the backs of trucks, separating the grapes from the stems - very labour intensive.

Even saw one of their trucks with a porta loo on the back!

Rode for in excess of 25 kms - longest ride yet and can't describe how super it was - can really understand why everybody here spends so much time riding.

Two + hours later came home happy, tired and with sore parts that I never knew I had.

### **Friday 13th and Saturday 14th October**

We are now looking for a campsite for two nights.

Criteria was it had to be picturesque, along a river, a town with some good restaurants to choose from and of course a good bikeway for this novice to enjoy.

Stopped at a few potential spots along the way but being very fussy about choosing a really good one, so moved on a few times until we arrived here.

### **[Zeltingen/Rachtig](#)**

#### ***Our campsite for two nights: Zeltingen/Rachtig***

We saw this spot back in March when we were headed for Poland but did not have time to stop here.

Filled all the criteria and again we got the 5 star spot in the front row overlooking the Moselle with the village right across the road.

Very pretty little village with lots of character, though no historic buildings.

It was a warm day though still overcast so the bikes came off and we set off.

Travelled to the town of Bernkastel-Kues around 12 kms away and spent a few hours exploring.

The hub for river cruises, it was so busy with tourists.

Really a great place and would like to have stayed longer but it was now 4pm and was time to head back.

Cheated on the way back with a little help from my pedal assist electric bike but a real achievement for me - I envy Rob who looks so at ease on his bike.



Woke up to a foggy day, couldn't see more than a metre or so into the river.

Today was our special day - fifty years to the day we met and 45 years married.

Our anniversary and the real reason for trying to find somewhere special to celebrate.

Zeltingen has many rose gardens in the Main Street and right outside Ziggy was a rose bush with one red rose in bloom - quickly picked and placed on the table for breakfast.

The fog lifted and the most beautiful blue cloudless sky replaced it.

Set off on foot after lunch to explore the town and to find a restaurant with atmosphere for tonight.

The twin villages of Zeltingen and Rachtig join at a bridge on the Moselle and both had restaurants to look at.

Long story short, after 2 hours of walking, the Spanish restaurant we were keen on closed last year, so good excuse to stop at the replacement and have a pint before returning back to Ziggy.

Couldn't find one with real atmosphere but had a great meal and some super local wine.

The menus here have two pages of food choices and 10 pages of wine selections.

### **Sunday 15th October**

Headed off early next morning, with fog thicker than the day before.

The temperatures have been so much milder over the last few days, we are hoping for more of the same.

All the prime places along this river are full of German motorhomes and by midday, most are full to capacity.

Bit like at home, where most of the retired people travel before or after school holidays.

### **Minheim**

#### **Our campsite for tonight Sonninsel, Minheim**

Fog still thick when we arrived here, it was difficult to see any view.

Within a couple of hours it lifted and again another magnificent cloudless blue sky appeared.

Again took off on the bikes for hours only stopping along the way for refreshments before heading off again on one of the prettiest stretches of river and villages to date.

Watched a Viking ship full of guests make their way along the river.

Lots of walkers, bikers and past a wedding venue where guests strolled along the paths past beautiful riverfront homes, restaurants and vineyards.

Didn't realise till now how much you wouldn't see if you didn't have a bike.

### **Monday 16th October**

Again a foggy day, we headed up the mountain into still heavier fog. Couldn't see much at all but eager with anticipation of another beautiful day ahead.

### **Saalburg**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Reisemobilpark, Saalburg**

We have left the Moselle River now with the intention of heading west towards England. Ziggy is booked in on 31st October for service and MOT so with only two weeks to go, we need to travel toward France or Belgium soon.

Once leaving the Moselle, we travel through uninteresting large industrial towns until we arrive here on the Saal River.

The fog is lifting and we are again blessed with picture perfect blue skies.

Off with the bikes and again after a few kms decide to cross the river into the village of Saalburg.

What a surprise - an old town with a castle and waterfalls running through the Main Street.

Restaurants on both sides of the waterfalls and all fully packed out on Monday for lunch - would you believe!

After locking the bikes, we became part of the scene and enjoyed a super lunch before heading back for a well deserved rest.

### **Tuesday 17th October – Multicultural Day**

Sadly we are leaving western Germany today and within a couple of hours found ourselves in 4 completely different scenarios as follows:-

- 1      Germany  
         Population around 85 million  
         Area – 356970 sq km  
         Principal language German with English now spoken by most people  
         Currency – Euro
- 2      Luxembourg  
         Population around 600,000  
         Area – 2586 sq km  
         Principal languages – French, German, Luxembourgish

- Currency – Euro
- 3 Belgium
- Population around 11.5 million
- Area – 30518 sq km
- Principal languages - Dutch, Flemish, French, German
- Currency – Euro
- 4 France
- Population around 70 million
- Area – 543965 sq km
- Principal languages – French, French and more French
- Currency – Euro

At least this time we had consistency in the currencies.

Not a sign of any border guards anywhere which surprised us, particularly into France where we had heard of strict border patrols.

Again we found towns near these borders sadly neglected (particularly France) with very little done to them since WWII.

Some still with bullet holes as a reminder of the past.

Colours disappeared once out of Germany with buildings all now predominantly grey and stained concrete.

It was another day with a cloudless blue sky - the fourth day now in a row and temperatures during the day are just fabulous - even wearing summer shirts for a large part of the day. Nights are still crisp.

Using Mr Google, we polished up on our limited French words as we drove through the countryside.

Certainly felt a little uncomfortable again from the lack of knowledge of the language here.

Our inter-personal communication experiences on past tours through France were not good but people we have met on our travels have said things in France have improved now.

Once out of the dreary border towns, the rolling hills and lush green countryside were refreshing with agriculture consisting of mostly patchwork coloured fields of potatoes, other crops and grazing cattle.

The soil is a rich red which contrasts beautifully with the hues of green.

Perched high on a hill in Montmedy is the amazing Citadel of Montmedy and its museum.

The parapet walkway is approx 1 km long and provides a panoramic view of the countryside.

## France

### Stenay

#### **Camp for tonight: Port de Plaisance, Stenay**

Only a very small village with not much happening.

Some of the towns we travel through look like ghost towns with little or no signs of habitation.

Everything happens behind closed doors we have realised and the only way one can find if a business is open is to open a door.

Very different to home where everything is so open and visible.

The Aire (French campsite) probably was a sports ground on a canal (couldn't call it a harbour really) where there are still massive overhead lights in the centre - once were probably tennis courts or similar.

Now converted to an Aire and spots for nearly 70 motorhomes.

The sign at the boom gates request registration and payment with the Harbour master called the "Captainere".

Looked like an old school marm and the office looked like something out of the forties with just her desk and a couple of chairs in a dark dismal room.

She didn't speak any English but we got there in the end and after parting with €8 and receiving the password for the gate happily nestled in.

Really beautiful spot on the Meuse River and for our dollars, free electricity, water and Internet (but only at the Captainere's Office).

Took a walk around the sleepy quiet town and ended up at the Musee Europeen de la Biere.

What a fantastic old building that consisted of three floors of beer making memorabilia.

The building itself took up a whole block and its architecture of stone walls and floors, worn old timber steps and timber beams that could hold up the Eiffel Tower, was in itself so interesting.

Learned a lot about beer making and the art of taking the cloudy look out of the final product.

Purchased a cloudy beer from the restaurant at the end of the tour - just horrible, tasted like beer with lemon juice and struggled to get it down quickly.

Came back to Ziggy and had a real Polish beer while watching the local folk play boules on a rink at the far end of the Aire.

## **Wednesday 18th October**

Again another blue cloudless day with the trip through the countryside really beautiful.

### **Charleville-Mezieres**

#### **Camp for tonight: Aire de Camping-car, Charleville-Mezieres**

This is a free Aire and backs up to a Camping Resort now closed for the winter season.

We are finding more and more camps closing now and by end of October heaps more closing making it more difficult to find spots coming into Winter.

Again we have spectacular views across the Meuse River and are right on a marina 5 star view and only 7 spots in total.

The twin towns of Charleville Mezieres are only a short 800 meters away along the river into the heart of town.

We strolled down the Rue De Moulin - the Main shopping street into the main square. Massive square with the regulation restaurants and bars around each side of the square.

The building architecture is all the same - three storey brown brick all butted up.

Stopped for the usual beer in the square and people watched until the sun started to disappear.

Can't believe the men's hairstyles - shaved heads leaving only a small tuft of hair on top or shaved except for massive braids tied with rubber bands on top - a few feathers would give them a part in the latest western movie - playing an Apache.

Tattoos are also very popular with each tattoo parlour full as if the "sale of the century" was inside.

Beautiful clothes, shoes and bags everywhere so zipped the purse tightly on the way back.

Arrived back on dusk to find another boules competition in full swing on the harbour front.

Certainly quite an aggressive sport with drives at the winning steel balls causing others to scatter in the head.

### **Lest We Forget**

## **Thursday 19th October**

A really peaceful quiet night though given some of the comments on the Parkings APP we were very surprised.

So many times we have found just the most beautiful place but because it is so great, seems that the younger generation love it too and come out to play at night and continue playing till the wee hours.

Fully rested we moved on through the countryside passing again through green fields of potatoes - hundreds of kms of potatoes and when the harvesters come in - these become mountains and mountains of potatoes ready for the trucks to come in and take to market.

## Rocroi

### **Camp for tonight: Aire de Camping-car, Rocroi**

Rocroi (Rocroy) is a unique star-shaped fortified town.

Our camp spot sits in a grassy and treed area just outside the moated (though now dry) and walled entry to this town.

The stronghold was first constructed in the 1660's during the reign of Henry II and modified several times since then.

It features an inner fortified defence wall with five different bastions projecting from the wall.

There is also an outer wall for both protection and attack.

On this outer wall are demilunes, projections and angles to the walls.

It is a remarkable example of one of the oldest fortified bastion towns in France.

Took most of the afternoon to explore both the outer and inner parts of the town - just truly amazing and really worth visiting.

### **Friday 20th October**

Rain and wind and a very cold morning greeted us - such a surprise given the five days of picture perfect weather we had had.

Passed through Saint Quentin looking for our camp for the night but entrance to the campsite from the bridge was blocked by roadworks and couldn't find a way around it so stopped for lunch and decided to move on.

This large town had no street appeal at all so we were not unhappy to move on.

Back into the countryside now and headed for our first French Passion stay.

## Sancourt

### **Camp for tonight: Les Canards de la Germaine, Sancourt**

Not quite a farm stay as it was located just a couple of kms outside of the town - only has spots for around 5 motorhomes.

The entry has a fenced farm yard including a herd of goats, turkeys, chickens and chicks, a pheasant and numerous other farm animals.

As the name suggests, they also have a duck farm adjacent and stock lots of duck products which are sold in the shop opposite the camp spot.

Very busy during the day with locals coming and going to purchase these goods.

They are also happy to provide fresh water if you need it (we didn't).

There is no cost for camping but they are very happy for you to visit the shop and hopefully buy some produce.

We did of course buy fresh farm eggs and some super duck pate which we will no doubt enjoy soon with some fresh baguettes.

They also had apples, cheeses and smoked duck etc.

They didn't speak any English so we couldn't understand what the other produce was.

Fed the goats which were no more than a metre away from Ziggy before retiring to a very peaceful and quiet night with only the noise of farm animals in the background.

## [The Somme](#)

### **Saturday 21st October – The Somme**

Roosters woke us up bright and early so we were keen to get going asap.

Today was going to be a long day as we wanted to see the memorials and cemeteries and pay our respects to the Aussie fallen soldiers in the many WW1 battle grounds in this area – the Somme, which is both a river and an area.

We spent a couple of very sad, moving and depressing days driving around the farmlands and fields of the Somme and in particular the areas of Villers Brettoneux, Amiens and Pozieres.

Just before leaving Australia , our son-in law Glen lent us an excellent book written by the Australian author Peter FitzSimons titled Villers Brettoneux and whilst in Germany our friends Michael and Pam lent us a book written by the Australian author Mat McLachlan titled Walking with the ANZACS.

Both these books gave us some background information on where to go and what to expect but the extent of the slaughter doesn't really hit home until you drive along the quiet little village roads and come across war cemetery after war cemetery with thousands and thousands of either little white crosses and or headstones marking the graves of known dead and unknown dead.

In the area near Pozieres there are cemeteries every couple of hundred metres – some are communal in that they have graves for Australian, New Zealand, British, Canadian and South African soldiers whereas there are a few dedicated to individual countries.

The Australian cemeteries are maintained by the War Graves Commission and they are kept in first class order – beautiful green lawns, lovely gardens, headstones well marked and easy to read and not an inch out of position

Each cemetery has a register and a Visitor book.

More than 330,000 Australians served in World War 1 – 61,000 were killed – 46,000 on the Western Front – the dead lie in 523 cemeteries across France and Belgium.

Mat McLachlan, the author of Walking with the ANZACS has a tour company – “Battlefield Tours” which organises tours through the battlefield sites – we saw some of his mini vans running around whilst we were there.

The first big Battle of the Somme commenced on July 1, 1916 when the British attacked the Germans across a 30 kilometre front – the British lost 60,000 men either killed or wounded on the first morning alone.

The Australian AIF First Division were introduced to this area at Pozieres on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July – this battle was the most costly battle of WW1 for Australia losing more than 23, 000 killed or wounded over a 6 week period – a lot for a young country with a small population.

More than one million soldiers on both sides were killed or wounded between July 1 and November 1916.

We also visited Thiepval Memorial which is Britain’s main memorial to its missing soldiers in France – it is a very high red brick monument and it bears the names of 73,000 British and South African soldiers who died in the Somme and have no known grave, including 7 VC winners – 55 Aussies who were killed while serving with British Forces are commemorated along with 10 Diggers who are buried there.

We visited most of the sites on a Saturday which was freezing cold, with a strong wind and light rain – sadly there were only half a dozen people at the Aussie sites but at Thiepval there would have been around 10 coaches each holding around 60 people.

We hope to be able to visit some Belgium sites late in 2018

## [Bapaume](#)

### **Camp for tonight: Aire de Municipale, Bapaume**

Strangely, there were very few camp spots available in this area and as it was getting late took the first available camp spot available.

Only four designated spots one street back from Main Street right next to a large mixed parking place with a skate board park at the end of it.

Had reservations about staying here, but it was still drizzling so thought the little skateboard demons might not play tonight - the Police also patrolled the area so felt quite safe particularly with the other motorhomes here.

Took a walk around town looking for a place to eat - boring town to say the least and not a thing open on a Saturday night except for a kebab shop.

Didn't look good so opted to have dinner in La Ziggy - nothing flash but good enough to get us through to the next day without starving.



The only item we found of interest was the plaque below which was dedicated to about 26 Australian soldiers who were killed by a German booby trap mine which had been hidden in the Bapaume Town Hall – the rest of Bapaume had been either destroyed or set on fire.

## **Our French Love Affair - NOT**

### **Sunday 22nd & Monday 23rd October**

Still have just over a week to go before heading across the English Channel so decided to head for the French Coast.

The French Aires (if not free to park at) are very inexpensive compared to Germany and Austria and most are based on a "user of services only basis" and charge for water and electricity, generally with grey and black water services free.

Stopped at a hardware store to get a short length of food grade hose and fittings – couldn't find any so asked the shop assistant for help after saying "non Francais" – well she threw her arms up in the air, made some sort of strange noise with her mouth and walked off – had to get help from a customer.

Drove a few klms and stopped in a Carrefour to stock up on groceries and had our second altercation with the French.

I went in first to start the shopping and shortly afterwards was told to head for the checkouts. It was only 12.30 on a weekday and I didn't understand why.

Rob tried to come in the entry door about 10 mins later, tried the doors but they were closed.

He followed someone through the exit door and was all but man handled by security.

He didn't want to shop but just help me at the checkouts.

Turns out they close their shops around midday for a period of time.

He stood his ground and they let him help me but we could feel all eyes watching us.

Not very friendly as we were in their lunch time, apparently.

## **St. Valery sur Somme**

### **Camp for tonight: Aire de Camping-Car, St. Valery sur Somme**

This is a very touristy town right on the Port with a marina and restaurants galore.

The camp itself is really great - takes around 100 motorhomes and is perched high on a hill just above the town.

Security barrier entrance which is always good and for €10 provides water and electricity at no extra cost.

We were needing water and most French Aires are now charging around €4 for. 100 litres - electricity was a bonus so over the next two rainy days we watched a lot of movies and chilled out.

A short 15 minute downhill walk to town, took us past some really old and run down buildings.

Once we reached town we headed for the Port and Marina.

We were rugged up with coats and hats as it was really windy and cold.

The boardwalk followed the ocean around forever and we passed the huge Marina with so many yachts - though none out today.

It is so surprising how dull and drab things look in these conditions, particularly the ocean which was also a dull grey.

Interesting town with so many old buildings - many with little or no work done on them for decades.

Picked up some brochures from the tourist bureau and learned of the medieval part of town.

It was only about a km away but decided to leave that until next morning when hopefully the weather might improve.

Back up the hill for movie night and on came Clint Eastwood with one of the Dirty Harry movies - we settled in with a few warm toddies and watched a few more movies.

Rained all night and by mid morning the weather cleared enough to hit the medieval part of this town.

With the promise of a nice French lunch on the boardwalk (had seen the restaurant we fancied the day before and looked very promising), we eagerly set off for today's adventures.

Focus point for the Medieval part is St Martins church, made of sandstone and believed to have been built in the mid 12th century.

It was built on the top of a cliff on a flat base supported by a large retaining wall shaped as a curtain wall.

It has been damaged a number of times throughout history.

Many dates are inscribed on the inner and outer walls dating back to 1338. It is still used as the working church in the area.

Took a couple of hours to walk through this unique part of town and found it so interesting.

Next for the long awaited lunch so off to the boardwalk.

It was nearly 2pm now on Monday and the restaurant had around 20 people inside.

The restaurant was split in two sides at the entry, we quickly noticed a large group with several small children (some of whom were screaming) on the right hand side and no one else so opted to head left where there were two tables of adults well into eating their lunch.

The waitress tried to usher us to the right hand side at a table next to the children but we said (in our very best French) "no" and headed left and sat down.

The waitress then totally ignored us for about 15 minutes and finally a waiter came to our table.

"No" - he didn't have a menu with English translations - and "no" we couldn't sit on this side as it was for drinking customers only.

Eating customers were to sit on the other side "with the children" - we were not happy with this as the other two tables next to us in this area were all eating.

Well - we just got up and left - French experience - number 2 in two days.

Bought a fresh baguette on the way home and had a gourmet lunch with French duck pate, Polish anchovies, Polish pickled red cabbage, jalapenos, avocado, Camembert, Polish pickled gherkins and lots of other goodies and opened our one litre bottle of German white wine which we demolished while watching our Ziggy movies.

This town is about 100 km south of Calais and without patronage from the British would die in a heart beat yet they make no attempt to speak or have signage or restaurant menus in anything but French – we must have been to at least 15 countries by now and this is the only country with that attitude – other countries have the home country language, plus usually English and either German or Dutch.

### **Tuesday 24th & Wednesday 25th October**

Again raining through the night and another overcast day ahead - had done some washing a couple of days ago so no sign of getting these dry anytime soon.

Next task was to tackle the exit gate from the Aire just after watching an English couple spend at least 10 minutes trying to pay and get out.

Couldn't be that difficult could it? - didn't want another French experience so went up for a sneak preview while they were getting out - yes, it would have been difficult so was pleased we checked it out first.

### **Stella Plage**

#### **Camp for two nights : Aire de Camping-Car, Stella Plage**

An absolute beachfront camp with only a large sand dune between us and the beach - twenty spots for motorhomes and no fee.

A dead end street with a resort at the end which has seen better days.

Very popular with most spots taken up mid afternoon - supposed to be low season now but still motorhomes everywhere.

Watched kids with toboggans slide down the dunes and dads with sons building sand castles.

We were protected from the wind by the sand dunes so happily enjoyed the bleak weather in doors.

Better day next morning so over the sand dunes we went and onto the beach.

People were everywhere for miles enjoying a relatively wind free day.

Really enjoyed the beach walk though we had the wind behind us.

Miles and miles of hard flat sand. (The Driver called them mud flats)

Arrived at what appeared to be the main part of town so off the beach and into the town to explore.

Looked like a place ready to demolish - this town took no advantage of the seafront - nothing on the seafront except car parks and run down old buildings.

Headed away from the seafront and hit "MainStreet" - the longest street you have ever seen - went for miles at right angles to the beach.

Lots of apartment buildings all with closed metal shutters at every window and door.

Not sure if it is a security issue or weather issue but very odd.

Highly recommend the camp spot and the beach but the town has nothing interesting to offer.

### **Thursday 26th & Friday 27th October**

Got up really late and didn't head off until lunch time. Only travelled about 30 kms today. Little bit of blue sky with lots of cloud so does not look promising.

Feeling like not much to write home about and has been difficult to get excited about writing the blog.

North West France has not been at all inspiring to say the least so excuse the lack of exciting things to write about.

We are only going back to the UK to service and re register Ziggy and then back over to Europe and looking forward to seeing the countries we have not yet been to in our previous visits.

### **[Neufchâtel-Hardelot](#)**

#### ***Camp for two nights: Parking Avenue Joseph Lesur, Neufchâtel-Hardelot***

We passed by relatively new beachside estates with beautiful homes (which was a nice surprise) with landscaped gardens - shutters are on these as well, maybe to keep the cold out in winter?

Much more inspiring town - the camp spot again is only a short walk to the beach and town and is in a very quiet location amidst quality homes.

It is overcast but no wind and no rain so headed to town. Just delightful to see well maintained homes and buildings and a town with a sense of pride.

Very touristy again, and the restaurants are full and there are signs of life here.

First time we have seen restaurants with outside glassed areas and would be a real buzz in the summer season.

We are sharing the camp site with two French and one British motorhome - look forward to catching up with the Brits tomorrow.

Still windy and cold today but no rain so off to the beach.

The sand is firm and a wonderful playground for land yachts.

Like wind surfers on wheels, there were 40 - 50 colourful yellow sails flying up and down the beachfront.

Strange to see families wearing Eskimo fur lined jackets and knee high boots building sand castles and playing on the beach.

Walked for miles and thoroughly enjoyed the time (though really cold) but looked forward to heading back with the wind behind us.

Strolled back into town which was alive and watched the fishermen opening fresh sea scallops shells and mussels and oysters in an open fish market in the middle of town.

Prawns are very expensive here and look very glum compared to the ones back home so have not as yet bought any though really hankering for a feed of fresh prawns soon.

Caught up with the Brits on return and spent a couple of hours discussing everything and more including the rude, arrogant French.

## Belgium

### [Zonnebeke](#)

#### **Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2017 - Zonnebeke Belgium**

Departed the lovely French seaside resort of Hardelot and had an uneventful drive to Zonnebeke Belgium.

Drove about 150 klms which was further than we wanted to drive but the driving was easy and we really wanted to see the World War 1 memorials in this area where so many Commonwealth soldiers lost their lives.

Arrived at a Café/Inn named De Dreve (also known as the "ANZAC Rest") or "Home of the Underground War".

Went inside the Inn to check with the owner to see if it would be ok to stay overnight on his property.

As soon as we walked in the door we were just grabbed by the ambience – we felt right at home – the walls were completely covered with Aussie and ANZAC memorabilia – not an inch of space was not decorated (even a Maroon Army Cap).

The owner, Johan Vandewalle, welcomed us and gave the ok to camp on his premises and offered to provide whatever help he could.

Johan has a private museum on the top floor of his Inn and he allowed us to view the memorabilia and some of his films.

Johan has lived in this area all his life and has dedicated much of his time to finding unknown Commonwealth soldiers who were buried somewhere in the fields surrounding his Inn (and he has found many).

The best way to describe Johan would be part time Inn Keeper, war historian, archaeologist, farmer and engineer.

We spent Saturday afternoon talking to Johan whilst his Inn filled up with mainly local elderly Belgium people who were extremely friendly and when they found we couldn't speak their language switched to another language until we found one we had in common. (German or English).

Johan gave us information including GPS coordinates regarding where to go to see the most important sites such as the Buttes in Polygonwood, Zonnebeke Museum, Tyne Cot Cemetery, Hill 60, Menin Gate, a German Cemetery and Messines Village Memorial and Visitor Centre.

On the Sunday we only had time to see the first three so will be coming back again – can't stay longer currently as we are booked in for our annual vehicle inspection in GB on 31<sup>st</sup> October.

We could have stayed all day just at the Zonnebeke Museum alone.

We did a standard museum tour and an add on tour through a dugout which is under the church on the Zonnebeke Museum site.

This dugout is in its original condition – the only one left and will be closed permanently in a week's time so we are very fortunate to have this opportunity.

The dugout is 10 metres underground and was used as accommodation to rest soldiers from the front line, to treat the injured and to house supplies and armaments – it is in original condition.

The strange thing was that all the car parks for the sites were overflowing with cars, 95% of which had Belgium number plates, the balance being mainly GB plates.

Sunday was really cold, wet and windy and yet all these local Belgian people went out to the memorials to pay their respects – they really appreciate what was done for their country.

Late Sunday afternoon we went back to the Inn again and it was packed with local Belgians.

We had a great time sipping on a few Belgian beers and then retired to Ziggy to prepare for the drive to Calais in the morning for the Chunnel journey across to GB.

Johan is trying to raise funds to build a memorial near his Inn but is struggling as Commonwealth officials don't seem to warm to the idea of a private individual being involved in something of this nature – Johan's project is called "Brothers -in-Arms Memorial Project" and can be viewed at [www.brothersinarmsmemorial.org](http://www.brothersinarmsmemorial.org)

The Brothers -in-Arms Project is based around the Hunter Brothers from Nanango Queensland, who were inseparable and the older brother John was injured in the Battle of Polygonwood in 1917 and died in his younger brother Jim's arms.

Jim carefully wrapped his brother up in protective garments and buried him along with four other Australian soldiers and promised to return after the war to find his brothers body and send it back to Australia.

The five soldiers became known as the "Westhoek Five"

Jim did return and searched in vain but could not find his brother's body.

Johan was part of a team who uncovered John's body in 2006 when pipes were about to be laid in the area.

There was an interesting article about Johan and his endeavours written by Greg Callaghan in the Weekend Australian in 2017.

Details regarding Johan's Inn can be found at [www.dedreve.be](http://www.dedreve.be)

## South East England

### **Monday 30th October - Thursday 2nd November**

Booked the Chunnel last night so looking forward to this new adventure. All the English Channel crossings in the past years have been either by plane or boat.

Left Zonnebeke Belgium in plenty of time to allow for traffic hold ups. Just as well as we struck standstill traffic along the highway which held us up for nearly an hour.

Ready with passports in hand at the Belgium border into France but again no sign of police or customs officers at the border.

The departure terminals were massive but really easy to navigate through.

Our Australian Passports were scanned but not stamped at French Customs (which worried us) with no questions asked or no inspection of Ziggy.

Next to English Customs and Passports were stamped and the only question asked was how long we were staying in England.

Straight through with no inspection and then onto the train.

Hard to believe we were travelling under water - what an engineering feat the Chunnel is.

Just over half an hour and we were at Dover and we could stay in the comfort of Ziggy all the way across.

Took a little while for my trusty driver to get used to driving on the other side of the road again in England having done 25,000 on the other side in Europe, particularly at roundabouts which were really scary with cars darting in and out of lanes to get across to their exits.

Nearly collected one that came across two lanes right in front of us.

### Rushenden - Our campsite for 4 nights: Leo Bay

We arrived here a day earlier than booked.

Set high on a hill overlooking the bay at Isle of Sheppey, only a small campsite with five designated spots apart from the permanents.

Leo Bay was fully booked but our hosts Steve and Sheila found an overflow spot for us for tonight.

Very homey campsite with great showers and toilets and what I would call a self contained flat without bedroom but with full kitchenette, lounge chairs and a fireplace plus a great outdoor deck overlooking gardens and lawn.

Bird feeders everywhere - watched birds happily swooping in at feed time.

Steve pre ordered parts we needed for Ziggy.

Had to replace the back of one of our side mirrors which we left behind in a tunnel in Norway and rear light cover which found its way around a garden post at a Lidl somewhere in Europe.

Had to get these fitted before heading off for our MOT (annual vehicle inspection) which Steve arranged for us for the next morning.

Ziggy passed with flying colours (the mechanic said Ziggy was in excellent condition) - so happy to get the big tick and head back to LeoBay to meet up with Debbie and Michael (soon to move to the Gold Coast) who had also booked in at Leo Bay for an MOT, full service and running repairs.

Spent many hours catching up with Debbie and Michael over a good red.

Next day, Steve had booked Ziggy in for a full service in the town of Sheerness nearby so took the opportunity to catch up with some internet at McDonalds whilst the service was done .

There was not a great deal to see in Sheerness.

Ziggy came through with flying colours with no repairs required during service and once again the mechanic saying that Ziggy was in excellent condition.

Next day Steve went about fixing some niggling but non mechanical repairs for us.

Our solar controller had not been working since the start of our trip so he replaced this.

Ziggy's intrusion alarm system was also not working and he fixed this as we were keen to get this done before heading to some of the less safe countries in the next



few months and lastly, Steve re positioned our rear view camera so it could be used as a permanent travelling camera and not just provide pictures of our bike rack and covers when in reverse.

Really had some wonderful days and nights with Debbie and Mike including a dinner at the local downtown pub only 20 minutes away.

They have a prospective buyer for Normie their motorhome and are heading to Asia for 5 months before heading home to the Gold Coast.

Really looking forward to catching up with them when we get home to Oz.

They reminded us that we have now dined with them in 3 different countries – at the Currumbin Surf Club in Queensland in February 2 weeks prior to our departure, in Berlin a couple of months ago and now in Kent England.

Thank you so much Steve and Sheila for looking after us and Ziggy and we can highly recommend your friendly, professional and efficient services to any fellow travellers.

### **Friday 3rd November**

Left early to grocery shop before heading to Dover.

No sign of Debbie and Michael being awake so opted not to wake them up so planned a phone call at Dover to say our Good-byes.

Caught up with Steve and Sheila for hugs and thanks with the likelihood of seeing them again next year for "bibs and "bobs" to Ziggy.

Arrived in Dover an hour early so were able to get on an earlier ferry today.

Again our French Customs experience was uneventful with a stamp and a wave before heading through security with a wave and through English Customs with a stamp.

Have used our Australian Passports throughout without any issues despite being in the Schengen area for 8 months rather than the legal 3.

A great day with blue skies and a sail across a calm ocean as we waved good-bye to the "White Cliffs" and enjoyed the short trip across the Channel back to France.

### **France**

### **Friday 3rd & Saturday 4th November**

Transition back to the tother side of the road looked easy (from the passenger side) and soon we were well away from the port of Calais.

Had passed through this part of France previously so the aim was to go through this part quickly to new territory.

The countryside here is just so special.

Green rolling hills and beautiful fields dotted with cattle here and there - mostly white cattle not the brown we are used to back home.

Their hides also seem to be thicker with fur and from a distance sometimes look like large sheep.

This must be the potato capital of the world as everywhere we travel, there are acres and acres of potatoes growing and then occasionally beside a ploughed field - mountains of freshly harvested potatoes which are loaded on to trucks by bulldozers - quite a sight seeing a line of several mountains - all potatoes.

Reminds me of a Beatles song "Potato fields forever" or is that "strawberry".

### **Boulogne-Sur-Mer - France**

The campsite is set high at the top of the hill with views across the Strait of Dover and the seaside town of Boulogne-Sur-Mer.

Great spot with only a short 15 minute walk down the hill to the harbour front which is a Mecca for tourists with a beautiful harbour front boardwalk leading to a new aquarium and currently under construction next door is a massive new casino.

It is really cold today drizzling with a strong wind making it even colder so we are fully decked out in warm coats, beanies, gloves etc.

We walked for miles along the boardwalk past fisherman selling the ugliest fish we have ever seen and the French buying them.

Then into the town centre with every second shop being either a patisserie (really tempting with all the delicious pastries in the window) or a restaurant – a really busy and interesting town.

Headed back up the hill tired and with mildly sore feet (had our new fur lined waterproof boots on).

Turned on the heater and sat in the front seat and watched as daylight went to darkness.

Such a lovely view with the town and harbourfront lights on.

Rain again next day so took time out to read and relax.

### **Cayeux-Sur-Mer - France**

Another great Aire adjacent to the beach.

The beaches in France seem to go forever and the distance from the edge of the beach to the water is huge particularly at low tide.

Tides changes are of around 9 metres so there are warning signs on most beaches.

We are on the Bay of Somme where the largest colonies of seal lions are reported to be.

We saw rubber duckies taking people out around the headland but did not sight any seals ourselves.

Not a nice day again so no reason for them to be basking in the non existent sunshine!

Only a very small village consisting of a few houses, two restaurants and a pub so did not take long to do the "must do" walk we try to do at most destinations.

They did however have a stall on the waterfront selling more of those "ugly fish" - didn't buy any!

Checked out the menus at the two restaurants.

Seems like they all specialise in Mussels cooked any way you want - tomato, cream, curry and many other ways.

We want to try these but only on a nice day so we can sit outside.

Oysters were a cool \$40 a dozen so - not today thank you!

White bait is also popular and could not help watching someone eating a plate of these micro small whole fish crumbed - heads and tails included! - not today thank you.

When we arrived it was high tide and the yachts in the harbour were fully visible above the dock.

By the time we had lunch and a walk, only the tops of the masts were just visible - massive drop in the tide.

### **Monday 6th November**

Bit of sunshine today - certainly feels good to get a bit of Vitamin D for a while - though still cold.

It is a real pleasure travelling through the countryside and not on the motorways.

Certainly the country homes are huge and most are of three storeys.

### **[St Valery en Caux - France](#)**

#### **Camp for tonight: Aire de Camping-Car**

Could have thought we were at the "White Cliffs of Dover" as this Aire is at the base of the white cliffs and similar cliffs everywhere along the coastline as far as we could see.

Interesting town, again on the oceanfront, with just a couple of minutes walk to town.

All the buildings on the harbour front were three storey townhouses, interesting and colourful (for a change) and most renovated.

The town is separated by a waterway and a bridge with yachts on the inland side requiring the bridge to be raised and lowered to allow the boat traffic through to the ocean front.

There are communal hard stand areas with hydraulic cranes on both sides of the waterway allowing boat owners to carry out repairs and anti-fouling etc – these areas are not even cordoned off.

Only a small town square with a few shops. There is however a casino at the far end of town and this was the only place with signs of life - the car park behind was full.

High on the hill above the casino, lay a well secluded bunker left over from the war.

### **Tuesday 7th November**

Not a good day today - first selection for a camp spot was not what we wanted for the night so selected another about 50kms away.

Keyed in the co ordinates and set off for the next destination.

About 10 kms from our destination, we discovered we were heading in the wrong direction.

This navigator certainly did not read out the incorrect coordinates and my driver certainly did not key in the incorrect co ordinates and our new Garmin NAVIE has not yet let us down - so who's to blame!

What should have taken 2 hours took nearly 5 hours.

Both driver and navigator remained calm and headed for the nearest spot to spend the night.

After all, we had travelled through some magnificent country roads and scenery, which we would not have seen otherwise!

### **Vieux Port - France**

#### **Camp for tonight: Parking Vieux Port**

One hour of daylight left when we arrived here, so stretched the muscles and went for a short walk.

The town must have some sort of building caveat and all houses look like something out of Hansel and Gretel - beautiful big homes all with thatched rooves on large blocks with sculptured lawns and gardens.

We are right on the bank of the River Seine now and boats are passing by only 15 metres or so away from us.

The beautiful town's stone church is the only building towering over our waterfront spot, with a few houses just around the corner.

Had the most peaceful night here only to be woken up to the sounds of church bells followed very closely by quack, quack, quack.

Three families of ducks were just outside our steps, obviously used to being fed by the motorhome visitors and were loudly telling us it was feed time.

### **Wednesday 8th November**

Another cold and wet day so fed the ducks and headed off again to yesterday's coordinates. The navigator, the driver and NAVIE all cross checked "to be sure, to be sure".

Visited the WW2 bunkers at Longues sur Mer.

The tourism office here has closed for the winter (November to March) so we braved the elements and the hillside alone.

Here there were four well preserved bunkers complete with original heavy artillery guns.

The camp spot is located adjacent to the bunkers and sits on top of the hill overlooking the WW2 Normandy beaches but was very open and really windy with no protection so decided not to stay here.

### [Englequeville La Percee - France](#)

#### **Camp for tonight: Ferme de la Rouge Fosse, Englequeville La Percee**

An hour or so later took us to this farm with six super, level, gravel camp spots each with large lawn plot beside - lawn that would make you proud to own at home with shrubs for privacy in between spots.

No wonder it is rated 8.8 and all for €5 including electricity.

Highly recommended and a great spot for overnight after viewing the WW2 Normandy landing beaches.

The farm house itself was amazing. Large enough to be classified as a Chateau.

Two storeys high with stone walls, outhouses the size of a normal home.

The barn itself was massive.

The farmer spoke a little English and told us he farmed grass and maize (corn).

Many tractor loads of grass and maize came in and out all day.

#### **Thursday 9th November**

Drove through light rain again today - with no signs of letting up.

Backtracked a couple of kms to the WW2 landing site at Omaha Beach.

Hard to imagine what happened here and along the miles of beaches as far as we could see.

Bus loads of tourists and school kids seem to follow us wherever we are.

The monument erected on the beach is really special.

We have seen bunker after bunker along all the miles of beachfront we have travelled - very moving to be on this beach.

## Fermanville - France

### **Camp for tonight: Vuutoren Fermanville, Fermanville**

Wanted a water view so found this most magic spot at Fermanville.

Great little town but parts were only 2.3m wide in total. Ziggy had to tighten the belt as she is 2.25 wide, so holding my breath and only managed with the skills of my driver with only an inch to spare to get through town.

So pleased nothing was coming the other way as I don't think my driver would have been able to reverse out.

Up the hill to the lighthouse and just below it was a parking spot for several motorhomes.

Again here we were the only ones (guess the 2.3 metre road width would have scared most off).

Just like being at the top of Point Danger on the NSW-Qld border in Australia - ocean views for as far as you could see.

It was very windy so after a short walk around the headland, headed back to the front seats and took in the view in warmth and comfort.

### **Friday 10th November**

Woke up around 1am with the wind howling outside.

Ziggy was gently rocking but my driver assured me all was good and he went back to sleep like a baby in a rocking bed.

I listened to him gently snoring and with that and the noise of the wind found it hard to sleep.

Morning did not come quickly enough.

We had three other motorhomes come through the night so we had company, all sharing the mighty wind.

Maybe a farm view for tonight would be good 😊.

Did not look forward to the trip back through town and held the breath again going through the narrow bits.

Soon we were back into the countryside.

The wind was still there and today we had the rare patches of sunlight (max 5 minutes at a time)

Had heard November was wet and windy in these parts - so true.

Arrived in the lovely town of Gavray and parked in the Aire which was right across the road from the Police Station.

Had planned to stay here for the night - quiet and safe.

Took only half an hour to walk around the town and with nothing else to do, decided to head off.

### [la Cucerne d'Outremer - France](#)

#### **Our camp for tonight: Aire Municipale, la Cucerne d'Outremer**

Another little town but soon discovered there was less here than Gavray.

Beautiful Chateau next door which is now a restaurant and function Centre.

Apart from a bar (we were going to have a well deserved beer here - but it was closed), a restaurant, a hairdresser and town hall, there were only a few houses.

Back to Chateau La Ziggy for dinner and drinks and a beautiful, restful, calm night - well needed by the navigator.

#### **Saturday 11th November**

We were parked under a tree overnight and were woken up by the sounds of little feet on the roof - think maybe a squirrel.

The wind had sprung up again and rain was falling down.

We left Aire Municipale La Cucerne, d'Outremer soon after a dance troupe had arrived and cars starting to pile in - the Hall adjacent was beginning to fill up.

One of the worst days for travel and we struggled to keep Ziggy from fogging up.

Mostly travelled on highways today so was reasonably easy going except on roundabouts.

As we travel further south, the roads are getting better, towns are getting larger and the housing on new estates is becoming more modern.

Still love the old stone and mortar country houses - they have so much character.

It is such a beautiful country and while not much seems to change here, everyday is a new adventure with new places to go and new towns to explore.

Our first stop for lunch is a little quiet.

We are deep in the country on a river lock system.

There is not enough to hold our interest and it is still raining so we headed off again.

### [Béganne - France](#)

#### **Camp for tonight: Port de Folleux, Béganne**

Not far from Rennes, we found this great spot at a marina in Béganne - room for about 10 motorhomes with the Marina office adjacent which is now closed for winter (October to March).

We arrived after 4 pm and it is now getting dark by just after 5pm.

The marina houses at least 100+ yachts and there is a height of activity with boats and people coming and going.

The weather has cleared for the moment so time for a short walk before dark.

Will explore more tomorrow (weather permitting).

There are two great restaurants here and the menus look great - sadly both are closed - probably for the winter so back to Chateau La Ziggy for a home cooked meal and a first class New Zealand Sav Blanc followed with a great night of music.

### **Sunday 12th November**

A little ray of sunshine today, strange feeling but appreciated a bit of Vitamin D.

Since we arrived back in France, we have been lucky to get a few minutes of sunshine on some days but never lasts long.

Today reached the dizzy heights of about 50% of sunshine - we are so spoiled back home with our weather.

This part of France is really beautiful as we head toward the Loire Valley.

Bought some new e-books from Lonely Planet today specially for road trips (they were offering a special for a few days at 60% off).

The ones we have are not dedicated to road trips and are more for backpackers.

### **Champtoceaux - France**

#### **Camp for tonight: Aire Municipale Champalud, Champtoceaux**

The Loire valley view from here is spectacular. The Aire was a little hard to find as it is situated right on the top of the hill behind the magnificent old church built in 1793.

The Aire is provided compliments of the local Municipale and has everything here - it is free to park and only €4 for power and water if you want it.

Lovely little place including the ruins of a medieval town, perched high on the hill and overlooking the spectacular view of the valley and water below.

The medieval city was built early in the 12th century with the Chateau-Caux (meaning elevated castle) its major feature.

The sun had disappeared and was replaced with really cold winds and threat of rain.

Again, we went in search of a restaurant/bar to have a drink and dinner but all three were closed (it is Sunday after all and it is off season!).

Found a sports bar open packed with locals all watching and betting on the horse harness racing (the ones we saw were in New York of all places).

Best they could offer for meals was sandwiches so had a drink at the bar and then back to Chateau La Ziggy for a home cooked meal.

### **Monday 13th November**



Woke up to a chilly day but with perfect blue skies (no wind yet) - have no idea how cold it was overnight.

Opened up our e books and spent quite some time researching the Loire Valley and its attractions to explore over the next week or so.

Scenery along the river is fabulous and we pass many Chateaus some in ruins and others fully restored and probably owned by the rich and famous.

Hard to find spots to stop and take photos.

### [St Clement des Levees - France](#)

#### **Camp for tonight: Parking, St Clement des Levees**

Another great spot with armchair views of the river.

The free camp spot was set on the lower level of the levee with the small village and a gigantic church on the upper level - only a couple of cars to share this great spot.

Again everything was closed - sign said "closed on Mondays" - should have been here yesterday, we joked!!

Watched the beautiful sunset and really grateful for a beautiful and rare sunny day.

#### **Tuesday 14th November**

Happy birthday Renee hope you had a super day.

Bright blue sky and sunshine - again!

The temperature overnight was a cool and crisp 0 degrees though nice and toasty in Ziggy with the heater on low overnight.

No ice on the windscreen as the silver screens and heater on inside seemed to do the trick.

Watched the ice being scraped off the windscreen off the car next door - obviously a local using this spot as his personal overnight car space - would probably have to dig it out in a few weeks time!

Travelled through lots of villages today - there seem to be so many in the valley - you leave one and then within a few metres, the next appears.

Obviously very flood prone in the valley.

The road running along the river is on a levee set high above the valley floor - parts of the river are almost dry and look like mud flats and other parts are full of water.

Mid morning and still there is frost on the grassy banks and mist rising from the river.

### [Langeais - France](#)

#### **Camp for tonight: Parking Chateau, Langeais**

As we pass through this village, we see houses built into the rock face - literally the front door is in line with the rock face.

Hard to believe anyone could live in there but they do.

Must be very dark but obviously no problems with snow on the roof or at the front door!

Six very narrow spots here are located right behind the Chateau De Langeais and right in the centre of town.

The Chateau looms directly above us - such a great sight and we have a small waterway (with ducks) behind us.

This medieval castle is one of the best examples of this type of castle in the Loire Valley, so we are keen to get the walking boots on and explore it.

So worthwhile - a real gem which took a few hours to explore.

Not only the chateau itself but the beautiful grounds which included Giant sequoia trees with tree houses and also the remains of a fortress wall - great little shop at the exit with souvenirs so bought a couple of small items here.

Time was getting on and after leaving the chateau, tried to find a post office to send these and other goodies home for the grandkids so our first stop is to the tourism office and then the post office.

It is now 2pm and sadly the tourist office closed at 1pm.

Found the post office which had just opened after a 2 hour lunch break and the customers were hanging out the door.

Gave this a miss and tried to find a lunch spot.

Not having much luck here as the two lunch spots we found - the kitchen closed at 2pm.

Had a quick lunch at our Chateau Ziggy and headed off for a long walk.

Went back to look at the houses built in the rock walls mentioned before - truly amazing.

Headed back on dusk, it was getting cold and we were not decked out comfortably to linger longer.

### **Wednesday 15th November**

Three in a row!! Another beautiful sunny day so we were eager to explore another three prime chateaus on the "best of Loire Valley Chateaus Lonely Planet list".

We drove through and photographed Chateaus in Azay, Amboise, and Blois.

Tried to stop at a few of these but not a lot of luck with trying to fit our Ziggy bus in spaces made for small cars.

### **[Domain National de Chambord - France](#)**

### **Our camp for tonight: Domain National de Chambord.**

Located just outside the village in a National Park, Chateau de Chambord is listed as the largest and most impressive of all the Chateaus in the Loire Valley (and there are so many).

It has 440 rooms, 365 fireplaces, 84 staircases and a double Helix staircase designed by Leonardo Da Vinci himself.

The outside structure is massive and so many different turrets and spires bobbing up everywhere.

Hate to have been managing the household and directing the staff to the various rooms.

24 rooms have been reconstituted over 4 floors.

The original stables are there with equestrian events held here regularly.

The gardens and waterways around the Chateau can be viewed from the top floor.

Obviously a very well protected historic landmark as while we were there, four military personnel armed with sub machines guns, gendarmerie on horseback with guns, security guards at every corner and helicopters hovering overhead were a reminder of security risks in this country.

Really enjoyed our visit here - though massive and very impressive and well done, not in our opinion the standard of Schonbrunn in Vienna, Austria.

Our campsite overlooks the castle and we are accompanied by 3 other motorhomes for a change.

### **Thursday 16th November - France**

Wanted an early start to head south now towards Spain and Portugal - the fog was so thick, it delayed our start until 10.30 am.

A long day travelling today with fog most of the way, so very little could be seen of the countryside.

### **Bessines sur Gartempe - France**

#### **Camp for tonight: Aire Municipale, Bessines sur Gartempe**

A great little Aire in the centre of a small village just off the highway.

Very little here with just a few small shops.

Spent a few dollars in the local bar and then had a very quiet and restful evening.

The church bells began to chime at 7am and not long afterwards it became really busy with traffic in and out of the parking area.

Mothers and dads dropping off small children to local shuttle buses ready to take them to the nearest school - not sure where.

The Municipale provides complimentary water and electricity, however the locals park in the spots so you can't get to them.

Several motorhomes here overnight and we learned that the locals are unhappy about the Municipale providing these spots and try to sabotage the motorhome facilities and even park in front of the motorhomes to stop them exiting and then walking away for hours.

Not many good things being said about the French from motorhomers here from many different countries.

The Gendamerie pulled into the car park in the morning at peak hour and sat and watched and did nothing about the locals parking illegally.

We had no issues at all and found the spot to be great for an overnight stay.

### **Friday 17th November**

Blue skies and a perfect day for travelling - we are now heading towards the north end of the wine region.

### **Monbaziliac - France**

#### **Camp for tonight: Chateau du Haut Pezaud, Monbaziliac**

Vineyards are now appearing everywhere and Lonely Planet tells us that we should visit lots of vineyards and sample wines and local produce - no argument for the driver or navigator so we pulled into just that kind of place for the night.

A great little winery just south of Bergerac with camp spots for 10 motorhomes.

Again when we pulled in around 2pm, we were the only ones here.

Wine tasting starts at 6pm so after a quick and late lunch we headed off for a walk through the vineyards to the small town a couple of kms away.

Apart from the hairdresser, little else was open so we continued on to the beautiful Chateau on the hill overlooking the town.

Just magnificent views over the valleys and the big town of Bergerac below.

Arrived back just in time for happy hour but found we were the only ones here for the wine tasting - just the wine maker and us - bummer and double bummer.

We didn't stay long but bought two great bottles of white wine and headed back to Ziggy.

We have found the whites here to be on the sweet side – even the driest white was a little too sweet for us. – did not like the reds at all but then again this area specialises in whites.

Thoroughly enjoyed the walk and the temperature today was heaps warmer than it has been over the last week or so.

### **Saturday 18th November**

Another warm sunny day - travelled across country today so not a huge amount to see.

Countryside was not very interesting with little farming and agriculture.

Mostly bushland with scrub - towns were only very small which became a problem as we were needing fuel and no sign of fuel stations for a long way.

There are normally heaps of stations, however the remote ones have no attendants and use only credit card 24/24.

We have found many that do not accept foreign cards which annoys my driver no end.

A number of the large supermarket chains have fuel and LPG but the lanes are very narrow and then channel into a cashiers booth for payment.

In a lot of cases impossible for Ziggy to manipulate the bends to get to the cashier - again annoying my driver no end.

### Villeneuve de Marsan - France

#### **Camp for tonight: Villeneuve de Marsan**

Another small spot for around 7 motorhomes but beside a reasonable size village.

We have tennis courts beside the Aire which provided a little entertainment from the novice players.

We noticed on the way in, that the town centre was packed with cars so took the opportunity to pay a visit into a village that seemed to be alive with activity for a change.

We stumbled across a massive flea market taking up every nook and cranny on every street.

You could buy anything from an old stove top iron (the kind great grand mother had) to an old Olivetti typewriter.

Mostly old clothes and shoes but most popular were stalls with kids used toys and clothes - did not need any of those so could not contribute to the local economy today.

Found some really interesting trees in the town square.

Very hard to describe but here goes - giant tree stumps with very short stubby limbs with what looked like warts on the end of them.

No leaves or branches, but maybe did have leaves in the summer season.

#### **Sunday 19th November**

Very peaceful quiet night but again chilly.

Didn't put the heater on last night but woke up to a chilly 7 degrees (inside Ziggy) at 8 am with fog outside.

No rush to get out in this weather so had a leisurely breakfast.

As soon as we ventured outside, our neighbour who came in late last night grabbed us and started talking to us in French.

Totally caught us unaware as this was a first for us for a Frenchman to actually approach us to talk.

Grabbed our trusty Google translator and discovered he had a flat battery and was looking for starter leads.

Couldn't help him but Rob went to other motorhomers and found an Italian who could speak French but no English 😊.

The Italian and the French gentlemen got on like a house on fire while my driver looked on in amusement.

Help for him was on its way so we packed down and took off at 11am - again in heavy fog.

More interesting countryside as we get closer to the Atlantic Coast with forests and avenues of stately trees lining the streets as we enter the towns.

Houses are taking on a new look with the hacienda style now appearing as we get closer to Spain.

Even saw restaurants with signs out for Paella.

### [Anglet - France](#)

#### **Our camp for tonight: Aire de Camping-Car des Consaires, Anglet**

The town itself was very large and busy and we had trouble negotiating around it but finally we came to the ocean side and our camp for tonight.

Normally a cost involved to stay here but no cost from end September to 1st April.

This huge camp spot was taken over by massive motorhomes all towing huge trailers and or cars.

Most taking at least three normal spaces - felt like a convention of maxi motorhomes was in town and they were all here.

Great spot adjacent to Anglet Beach - here there was a magnificent blue ocean with real waves and board riders and a great beach though not as white as ours.

We took off along the beachfront and walked along the boardwalk where there were restaurants and beachside bars for kms.

Such a beautiful day and brought back memories of our beautiful beaches back home.

Left the oceanfront boardwalk and headed up the hill (quite steep and difficult) towards Biarritz.

The view from the top was breathtaking and from there we ventured down to the town itself.

Magic place with another beach where the locals gathered at all the oceanfront restaurants and enjoyed a really wonderful sunny Sunday.

A really trendy seaside town obvious by the hundreds walking and eating on the beachfront here.

Time to head back as we had already been walking for about two wonderful hours - not tired I said - but my driver reminded me we had at least two hours back.

He was right because with about half an hour to go, the bones were really struggling and the light was fading.

We were really happy to see the last hill to climb to the waiting doors of our Ziggy.

Leftovers and a bottle of good wine was all we needed before entering into a well deserved slumber for the night.

Our last night in France was a good one and we looked forward to entering Spain tomorrow.

## Spain

### Monday 20th November

Again no border checks between these countries.

Another magnificent day with blue skies and no wind, could not be happier than when the sun shines.

Not a long trip today but the area along the coastline is really busy with traffic and we have seen more motorhomes here than anywhere else for some time.

### [Donastia San Sebastián - Spain](#)

#### **Our camp for tonight: AutoKarabanak Paseo de Berio, Donastia San Sebastián**

A very large town which provides this camping ground exclusively for 30 or so motorhomes.

When we arrived it was half full and close to capacity by next morning.

Set behind the university and backing onto a hill, it was extremely quiet.

Had read about the fabulous Old Town here and were really keen to try the Pintxos or Tapas they refer to in our bible, so headed off with absolutely no idea which way to go.

Had learned a few words of Spanish during our drive here so armed with our best Spanish, we approached three young girls sitting on the steps of the University for directions.

Just so refreshing, they got up and walked us to the bus stop.

Another young man we approached here, told us to catch the No 5 bus and get off at the last stop – Boulevard - he waited with us until the bus arrived, hopped on and

told the driver where we wanted to go and then the bus driver told us when to get off- a breath of fresh air.

Boulevard is in the heart of their Old Town with the Tourist Office right at the bus stop.

Old Town is right on the tip of Kontkxa Bay so several parts of it offered a splendid view across the bay and the beautiful Kontkxa Beach.

The marina there houses hundreds of small fishing boats, all packed in like sardines - very colourful.

Spent the whole afternoon going up and down the many fabulous cobblestone streets and of course stopping at one of the Tapas Bars which was absolutely packed.

They certainly cater and welcome tourists here and the menus are in seven languages so made it easy to order.

The tapas are a highlight here and are spread two tiers high across the bar area so you could just point to any of the delicacies you wished to eat.

We sampled six treats and washed them down with a couple cervezas (beers) and then happily waddled towards the bus stop.

Next challenge was finding our way home.

We found the bus stop and hopped on the No 5 and asked to go to the University.

We didn't know the name of it, but thought we could recognise it.

Wrong, the bus does not go back the same way as it came and the streets did not look familiar.

The bus driver came to our rescue and stopped the bus, let us out and pointed the way to the University just around the corner. Now that is looking after tourists.

Should have stayed another day here as there was so much more to this great town and campsite and would highly recommend at least two days here.

### **Monday 21st November**

Travelled away from the coast and headed south west towards the La Rioja Wine Region.

The countryside interestingly now has changed significantly and everything is drier.

The green hills are gone and have been replaced with arid mountains similar to those we have seen in the black hills of Dakota USA.

The landscape looks like something out of an old western movie where you see the tumbleweed scurry across the fields.

No grass anymore just spindly bushes.



The soil here is obviously very suited for wine growing and wherever we look the fields are full of vineyards (not green like on the Moselle) but brown and dry.

## [Elciego – Spain](#)

### **Our camp for tonight: Barrihuelo, Elciego**

The town itself is very small and set on a hill overlooking the vineyard valleys.

Everywhere in the town they have Bodegas which are wineries all keen for sales and open at different times.

There are so many bodegas here but two that are outstanding. The first is a short km walk from here so visited this one in the afternoon.

The Marques de Riscal Hotel is a Starwood Property set on 100,000 square kms dedicated to the production, storing and study of wine and is called The City Of Wine.

Designed by the Canadian Architect Frank O Gehry, the building is a flamboyant wave of multicoloured titanium sheets - just stunning and so hard to describe but the picture will tell the story.

There are no free wine tastings here or in most of these bodegas so the only way to try the wines is to book a tour through the winery at a cost and you may get a couple tastings included in the price of the visit.

We sat at the wine bar and paid for and sampled a couple of whites and reds before heading home through this quaint little hillside village with our purchases.

Only a few kms north of the town of Laguardia is the Bodegas Yslos.

Architecturally it is one of the most gob-smacking bodegas in Spain.

It's wavelike roof is made of aluminium and the exterior walls are made of cedar wood - just stunning with the backdrop of the majestic mountains in the background.

### **Tuesday 22nd & Wednesday 23rd November**

Again we travelled through countryside that was more than uninteresting.

Thought we were heading the wrong way as the only traffic on the road were trucks, trucks and more trucks - only the occasional car and definitely no motorhomes heading this way. Really hoped we wouldn't break down as there were no villages for as far as you could see and beyond, mile after mile.

## [Burgos - Spain](#)

### **Our camp for two nights: Area de Burgos, Burgos**

Amazingly beautiful large town - spent two days here and still did not see everything.

The camping area is complimentary and has all services except electricity provided.

Very few of the 35 spots were unoccupied during this time - very busy but very quiet and peaceful at night.

Walked the soles off our shoes over the two days and saw so much.

This town is a Mecca for cathedrals, churches, museums and the tapas bars and restaurants were just excellent and so inexpensive.

Bought two beers that cost under \$2.00 each and the huge tapas were about the same price.

We only managed to eat two each. The locals use these bars to meet and mingle and play cards - very interesting.

La Catedral de Burgos was truly amazing perched high on the hill above the Old Town, it is a declared UNESCO world heritage site.

From there we climbed about 80 steps to the castle on the hill which we found had closed 10 minutes before we got there.

Got some great panoramas of the town though before heading back down and then the 3 kms back to Ziggy.

So glad we found this town and is really worth the visit for a couple of days.

For fellow travellers: Head north past the Alcampo superstore along Avenida d'Castilla Leon which leads onto Avenida de la Paz and keep going until you hit Centrum - from there the spires of La Catedral de Burgos can be seen from most parts of Old Town.

The traffic in here is chaotic with very narrow one way streets so walking is suggested.

We drove on the first day and walked it on the second day and would not recommend driving in a motorhome.

### **Friday 24th November - Spain**

We have now left the higher country and are travelling through the valleys - so different here with not a mountain to be seen except way out on the horizon.

Again very little greenery and the few trees we see are now without leaves.

It is farmland here with ploughed fields everywhere but they are all brown so not sure what grows here.

Everything is so flat now you can see highways criss-crossing everywhere for miles with so many overpasses literally man made looking like arches in the distance.

### **[Leon - Spain](#)**

#### **Our camp for tonight: Parking de Autocaravanas, Leon**

Green trees now appear as we arrive in the large town of Leon - again a very busy and populated town.

We arrived at our campsite, a great spot in the middle of town, with about 15 free spots provided by the local municipality.

The town is split by a river (though not much water in it) and the campsite backs onto the boardwalk which runs along the river.

Parking inspectors were booking cars just in front of us - motorhomes are free but not local cars!

We befriended the inspector who spoke a little English and soon he gave us a wealth of local knowledge and directions to the Catedral Leon, the Museum and the Old Quarter where of course he said the best and cheapest tapas could be found.

We never get sick of the majestic cathedrals and unusual architecture in Old Towns wherever we go, so again spent a few hours walking.

Didn't however stop to eat as we have been doing a little too much of that since arriving in Spain.

Back for a delicious home cooked chicken and vegetable soup and made it through another alcohol free day.

### **Saturday 25th November**

Had a little rain overnight but today is another beautiful day of cloudless blue skies.

Travelling along the flat open valleys was really easy, so we put on the iPod music and just enjoyed the scenery.

Through more cultivated pastures - this time with a few patches of green vegetation showing through and acres and acres of vineyards again with more bodegas.

Saw the most unusual cloud formations along the horizon - banks of white clouds really low with the sun shining on top of them - normally the view you get when in a plane above the clouds.

### **Zamora - Spain**

#### **Camp for tonight: Parking de Valorio, Zamora**

First appearances driving into this town were deceiving with street after street of nondescript apartment blocks.

A real surprise package during our walk through Old Town where it was hauntingly beautiful with medieval monuments throughout.

Again a spectacular Catedral and Museum as well as never ending streets of old buildings and many town squares.

The campsite was adjacent to a large and beautiful park where there is a children's playground and gym equipment for the adults.

The park is huge and beautiful with trees in full Autumn colours.

We sat and watched many of the locals using the gym.

It was really cold outside - late evening and even colder in the morning, but there they were in full tracksuits, gloves, beanies and scarves training in the cold.

We sat inside Ziggy with the heater on watching 😊.

### **Sunday 26th November**

Only drove a short distance today to Salamanca and again another cloudless blue sky for our short but sweet trip.

#### **Salamanca - Spain**

#### **Our camp for tonight: Parking de La Santisima Trinidad, Salamanca**

The roundabouts in this town are really scary - they include streets that go through the middle of the roundabout, traffic lights, stop signs and give way signs and the traffic criss crosses through them.

We were so glad to see the end of them and happily parked Ziggy here for the rest of the day.

The campsite is beside a beautiful old church with a children's playground beside the camp spot and then the river.

A short walk across the bridge and we were in the heart of Old Town.

Visited the Salamanca Cathedral which is just amazing. Built in late gothic and baroque styles, the two parts incorporate the old Cathedral built in the 16th century and then the Cathedral Nueva (new) built much later in the 18th century.

Every street has old Renaissance style churches and buildings which lead to several small squares. The most spectacular square is Plaza Mayor built in the 17 hundreds.

This was full of life with flamingo dancers performing in the centre.

Bars and cafes again around the extremities of the square with so many young people just sitting, eating, drinking and enjoying themselves.

As we had been walking for hours, it was time to sit and enjoy and watch until it became so cold and late, we headed back home before it became too dark.

### **Monday 27th November**

Another great day though a little overcast at the beginning.

We travelled along one of Spain's scenic routes from Bejar through Plasencia and then onto Caceres.

The highway wound through hilly countryside with picturesque views across the mountains and valleys.

Really enjoyed the travelling today and in no time arrived in Caceres.

#### **Caceres - Spain**

#### **Our camp for tonight: Area de Valhondo- 10, Caceres.**

We had been warned this was a popular spot and filled up quickly so were surprised to find when we arrived at 1.30pm that only 8 of the 20 spots were occupied.

Had a quick bite and then headed off to the historic centre of Old Town about 800m away which was truly extraordinary.

Narrow cobbled streets twist and climb among ancient stone walls lined with palaces and mansions.

The skyline is decorated with turrets, spires, gargoyles and enormous stork nests.

Built in the 16th century and protected by its defensive walls, it is still almost intact.

Again several squares meet at different points throughout Old Town but Plaza Mayor is the feature.

Bit quiet on a Monday but still had time to stop, have a well deserved drink, and take it all in.

Back to Ziggy to find the camp site full and every spare spot along the way, there was a motorhome - even the spaces delegated for bus parking were full of motorhomes.

Remarkable given the number of motorhomes here, it is really quiet.

We have been so lucky with our choices of campsites with very few along the way being noisy or troublesome.

## Portugal

Note: My iPad crashed on 30th November so all my notes for the next few days are no longer accessible so will try to remember as best as I can information about these days.

Apple have not been able to rectify the problem as yet and the poor internet reception has not helped them.

Unfortunately all our blog information, travel apps, maps and notes are on this iPad.

Rob's Ipad is ok but all the important information was on mine

## **Tuesday 28th November**

Woke up to rain this morning so decided to travel a longer distance today and head for Portugal.

Again no border patrols and the only indication that we had crossed the border was when our phone beeped and told us so.

The countryside is much more picturesque now as we begin to head closer to the coastline.

The villages and towns are so beautiful here as every house is white with either red or predominately terra cotta tiled roofs.

With the backdrop of the green countryside, it is amazing - only differences between the houses are the colours around the window and door frames which are mostly different shades of blue.

Would love to have an exclusive franchise for white paint and terra cotta tiles here.

### [Estremoz - Portugal](#)

#### **Our camp for tonight: Markt, Estremoz**

We arrived around midday and parked in a large car park in the middle of Estremoz.

It was still drizzling so put on our wet weather gear and headed up the hill to the old town above.

This was totally enclosed by massive fortified walls which were built in 1299.

Many of the old stone houses within the walls were restored and are now occupied by locals.

Businesses also of course were there to take advantage of the tourist trade.

In the middle of this old town was a square walled castle which has been restored and now houses a fantastic hotel included as one of Europe's historic hotels.

Sadly more information re this has been lost in my iPad now.

Whilst in a local pharmacy the local pharmacist, who spoke perfect English and was so helpful, recommended a restaurant serving traditional Portuguese food, so headed in that direction.

It was closed then but reopening at 7pm.

Went back to Ziggy and had a couple of pre dinner drinks and then headed back to town - it was still raining.

Ordered something similar to a seafood paella which was massive and washed that down with a great local white wine (recommended by our waiter).

We had such a great time with the locals here even though no one spoke English.

The waiter was excellent and really looked after us.

At the end of the night he plonked two half bottles of alcohol in front of us and said we should taste these.

One was like a vodka moonshine and was so strong, the other a milder red grape liqueur that was beautiful.

He insisted we drink these and/or take them home - we left the moonshine but happily downed the red liqueur.

Happily headed home on unsteady legs (in the rain) and spent the next couple of hours plucking up the courage to climb the 2 steps to the mezzanine floor to sleep (I hope).

### **Wednesday 29th November**

Woke up to fog - not only outside but my head was a little foggy as well.

The driver was fine but the navigator needed a lot of water.

Had such a super first night in Portugal but paid the price today.

A hearty breakfast and a couple of headache tablets for me - and we were on our way.

The fog lifted and what followed was a picture perfect day with sun and blue skies.

The town of Comporta was our planned destination.

Really pretty town with the camp site on the edge of town and the police station on the other corner.

Were looking forward to exploring the town but not long after, we discovered our auto gas supplies were really low.

Decided to move on and find a servo with auto gas as we were concerned about running out overnight.

### **Grandola - Portugal**

#### **Our camp for tonight: Parque de Grandola, Grandola**

It was getting late now and didn't have a lot of choice of places to camp after filling up with gas.

Grandola had nothing to offer apart from a place to stay for the night.

A large car park with Motorhome facilities and shared the spot with a few other Motorhomes and many trucks who use the same place for overnight sleeping.

Very quiet spot and a peaceful sleep considering the above.

### **Thursday 30th November - Saturday 2nd December**

Travelled along some scenic routes now along the Portugese west coast.

Beautiful countryside with the occasional glimpse of sparking blue ocean.

We were heading for the Algarve region of south western Portugal.

Again many beautiful villages along the way with those magnificent white houses and terra cotta roofs - just never get sick of seeing them - just so beautiful.

### **Figueira - Portugal**

#### **Our camp for three nights: Figueira Caravan Park, Figueira**

Tucked away in the extreme south western corner of Portugal is the little town of Figuera. We decided to stay in a caravan park tonight as we needed to catch up on laundry.

Headed through some really narrow streets with some not so desirable looking homes and buildings for a short while.

Wanted to get straight out of there but just around the corner the camp site came into view.

Still not sure if we wanted to stay here but after a great welcome by the manager and a cheer from a group of Brits, we felt right at home.

We scored a fantastic spot overlooking a garden - someone had just left here - we were so lucky.

The Brits thought we were one of theirs because of our GB number plates but were just as happy when they discovered we were Aussies.

Had three wonderful relaxing days here.

The sun and blue skies greeted us every day.

The Brits were in shorts and bikinis and soaking up and worshipping the sun on sun lounges all day.

We were still in long sleeves and trousers.

Temperatures during the day were around 20 degrees but nights are in very low single digits.

Gave Ziggy a wash and debug, did the clothes washing and spent a few hours walking daily to the really picturesque beach about 1.5 kms away.

Really small beach about the size of Froggy's Beach at Tweed Heads and waves and stunning blue waters with rocky mountain outcrops framing the beach.

Made quite a lot of Brit friends here - most were permanent travellers with no plans to return home any time soon.

Have received many varied opinions on Brexit and the EU.

### **Sunday 3rd December – great morning to be an Aussie**

It is great to wake up on a Sunday morning to the news that Australia has cleaned up England in the first Ashes cricket test and that Australia beat England in the Rugby League World Cup final – especially when you are surrounded by Brits and pretend you don't know the results and then ask them if they know the results – I have never known of so many Brits who suddenly don't follow cricket???

Reluctantly left this morning but knew there was so much more to see in the Algarve area.

Know for sure, that we will see lots more Brits and many other people from northern countries trying to escape the cold.

Didn't travel far today - only around 50kms but again a picture perfect day.

### **Our camp for tonight: Camperplaats Alvor, Alvor**



Passed through Lagos which is a huge town.

Saw hundreds of Motorhomes parked in the caravan park and knew we would have a challenge from now on finding places to stay. Only a few kms away was our next destination Alvor.

This is definitely a really touristy destination. We rounded the corner and saw Motorhomes parked everywhere.

The campsite itself is right on the oceanfront and is nothing special.

There are so many Motorhomes in here - more than we have seen anywhere.

The campsite itself does not have a blade of grass to be seen anywhere and the soil is rich red.

A real problem if it rains as obviously turns into mud - no rain in sight today so hope it stays that way – when no rain it is a dust bowl.

We walked along the boardwalk to the oceanfront - just like home with miles and miles of beautiful blue ocean and beach - though not quite as white as ours at home.

From there we headed to the fishing village on the oceanfront where there were numerous restaurants - all packed with tourists eating, drinking and soaking up the sunshine (nearly all Brits).

Next up the hill to the centre of town.

The narrow cobble stoned streets had restaurants on both sides for at least one to two kms.

Some were closed until 21st December but most were still open.

Continued walking for an hour or so into the centre of this town until we came across a bar and restaurant offering a pint of really good beer for €0.90 (AUD1.30).

Just had to have one of these and sat and people watched for some time.

A group of Brits arrived and soon took over the bar so decided it was time to head back.

### **Monday 4th and Tuesday 5th December**

To date, the Internet speeds and phone reception in this part of Portugal have been woeful.

Apple asked us to find somewhere with high internet speeds and good telephone reception so that they could assist us with unlocking my iPad.

With the 10 hour time difference to Australia, it also caused some issues and has only given us a short time frame in the morning to speak to a technician in Australia.

On one occasion they forgot about the time difference and phoned us around 02:30 AM.

## Vale de Parra - Portugal

### Our campsite for two nights: Parque Da Gale, Vale de Parra

This campsite was excellent and has an extremely high rating awarded by guests staying here.

Internet speeds were excellent so we set about reloading some of our travel APPs onto Rob's iPad (just in case we couldn't get mine going again)

Rob's has only a quarter of the RAM that mine has so we were limited with what we could download.

We contacted Apple and booked in a call for 8.30am next morning.

At this campsite there is a games and TV room and a small billiards table so after a long walk, we hit the table and played a couple of games.

My driver negotiated all the bends and successfully parked all his balls in the pockets whereas the navigator tried to find alternate routes and was not as successful.

It didn't help that the cue attached to the rest was broken so many shots were played left handed or stretched across the table with legs dangling in the air - not a pretty sight - we had fun though.

Call came through from Apple at 8.30am sharp and Benjamin (based in Perth) was extremely helpful.

He went in through iCloud and was able to find our original iCloud password used to set up the iPad many years ago (very different to what we thought).

Next we had to reset the password and then wait another 24 hours for acceptance.

The campsite also has a heated pool but no one was in swimming even though it was a fabulous sunny day, the temperature in the middle of the day was still a cool 18 degrees.

Only a short couple of kms away was the beautiful beach with really interesting rock formations. The rocks were in the middle of the beach where the beautiful deep blue ocean had gouged away the bottom leaving a stem with a top - bit like a mushroom.

Played more billiards, read books and just relaxed for the rest of the day.

Email arrived next morning with steps provided to reset my iPad.

Watched my best friend become more agitated with each keyboard stroke - Apple products !!! - won't say the words he used - finally after an hour or so - success.

Got to thank Apple though as they were really great to deal with and so helpful – shame about the products – being locked out of your device having used it for a year or more does not make sense.

### Wednesday 6th December

The navigator had a spring in her step today - had so missed the iPad.

It is really amazing to think of the hours one spends per day on these devices.

What ever did we do before computers?

Another picture perfect day today.

We are heading into Orange Country now and everywhere there are acres and acres of orange trees.

On the side of the road, stalls are set up with sacks of oranges for sale for €5 for three sacks - think somewhere from 3 - 5 kgs per sack - if only I had my juicer.

My driver would not volunteer to squeeze these for me, so bought just a few from Lidl instead - what a shame.

### [Santa Luzia - Portugal](#)

#### **Our camp site for tonight: Area St. luzia, Santa Luzia**

What a find - a small fishing village on the river.

Couldn't wait to explore this one so no sooner than the engine was turned off, we headed off.

Just across the road, the tide was fully in and a multitude of fishing boats bounced around in the current.

There was a beautiful boardwalk along the river front with restaurants and outdoor eating areas in the sun.

At the end several fishermen's huts and beyond that some truly beautiful Spanish/Portugese apartment blocks.

The town only has a few streets and we happily walked through all of these taking photos of the townhouses with their fronts featuring a full wall of mosaic tiles.

Some were really gory but some really spectacular.

Next morning we again headed up the boardwalk and took more photos - this time the river was almost dry at low tide and the fishing boats now sitting on mud flats - what a difference a full tide makes.

Saw a timber rowing boat being hand made on the side of the road - a real craftsman and a large fishing boat high and dry and leaning into the jetty for support.

#### **Thursday 7th December**

Decided to do "a sea change to tree change" today so headed inland to the mountains.

Quite a big difference to the coast where now the soil and the landscape is so dry.

### [Alcaria - Portugal](#)

#### **Our camp for tonight: Almada D'Ouro Club, Alcaria**

We climbed high into the mountains and found our next campsite sitting on the peak with views over the mountains and valleys, Spain on one side and Portugal on the other.

A beautiful river meandering through the valleys in front of us and small villages dotted throughout the valleys - so easy to see as they are white against the green backdrop.

This is a Hunting Club that provides space for around 20 motorhomes - all with spectacular views.

Inside the clubhouse, there are pictures of hunted wild pigs and ducks and a bust of the head of a wild pig - very scary looking.

The bar opens at 5pm and you can have any drink you can see on the shelf for just over €1.

Had a couple of wines (not the best we have tried) though the port was great and shared the sunset and conversation with two German couples - one with the same surname as my mother - but don't think we are related.

The Driver had a ton of fun practising his German until one of the young German guys starting speaking in Swabish (a type of high German dialect) and so we decided to retire to Ziggy as it was also getting too cold outside.

That is the end of Portugal for us – we have really enjoyed our stay – it is a lovely country, with beautiful friendly helpful people.

## Spain

### **Friday 8th December**

Back to Spain today after some glorious days in Portugal where we had superb weather - every day was an almost picture perfect day.

Again no challenges or hold ups going across the border though we did notice the lanes on the opposite side of the road going into Portugal were being stopped and inspected.

Certainly this is the land of oranges and vineyards as these take up almost all of the landscape along the way.

Even the towns we have been driving through have avenues of oranges growing in the streets of town and these are full of fruit (though lower branches have been stripped bare and only those up high surviving).

### **Matalascanas - Spain**

#### **Our camp for tonight: Plage Matalascanas, Matalascanas**

Back to a sea change today as we head for the southern tip of Spain.

The entry into this town has a fantastic National Park on both sides of the road but soon it was quite obvious that this town is a prime holiday resort destination.

We pass by hundreds upon hundreds of magnificent holiday homes and seaside apartment blocks.

Our camp site is at the far end of a long wide sandy beach and along this beach front is a wide and long pedestrian walk and bikeway.

Restaurants and more apartment blocks take up every inch along this 6km block.

Off came the bikes (long time since weather and biking conditions were so good) so happily rode along taking in the sun, sea and great views.

Stopped at the end where the feature "rock in the sea" was the focal point for people to take pictures and stop at one of the great open air restaurants.

We did the same and sampled some great cuisine and beers (served in a glass that was so cold, the beer formed icicles on top) and stayed until almost sunset then hurried back just as the sun was going down.

The beachfront Boardwalk and restaurants were alive with people and we learned it was a public holiday so people were down here to take advantage of a long weekend.

Sadly there are so many signs of the effect of the GFC here with many buildings not completed and just left.

There was a massive resort directly behind our campsite which had just finished before the GFC and never got to open its doors.

The pay station was closed when we arrived and again in the morning there was no sign of anyone wanting to take our money.

### **Saturday 9th December**

Had such a wonderful day but really looking forward to visiting Seville today.

### **Seville - Spain**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking Seville Puerto, Seville**

This is a massive mixed parking area that was only supposed to take around 10 motorhomes but when we arrived there were four times that number and places that would normally be taken by cars were used for motorhomes - most were Spanish - probably because of the long weekend and the warmer sunny conditions.

The campsite is right on the river and only a short walk across a bridge took us right into the heart of this huge town.

Thousands and thousands of people were everywhere and every restaurant and bar was packed to capacity.

The queues to see their most spectacular Gothic Cathedral and other historical sites was so long, it would have taken hours to see them inside.

We walked around gob smacked - what an unbelievable town this was.

Horse and carriages were everywhere taking tourists around the many cobbled streets.

Entertainers were on every street corner - even had Mickey and Donald Duck ready to pose for photos with the kids - at a cost of course - flamingo dancers performed in one of the squares.

We walked and walked for hours, taking in Seville's bull ring, the Gold Tower and the beautiful gardens and so many other beautiful buildings and town squares all ready with lights perched on Xmas trees and buildings and walls of fairy lights looking like waterfalls - just waiting for nightfall to showcase this fairytale atmosphere.

Couldn't find anywhere in the main central area to eat as it was so packed, so had to resort to finding something in one of the many side streets until nightfall.

Didn't take long before the lights came on, so left our restaurant and joined the crowds which now had tripled since we left them an hour ago.

Only moved at a snails pace and were dragged along with the crowd.

So many strollers and children now here to see the Xmas lights.

Hard to describe the feeling as we walked around - just so amazingly beautiful and so special seeing the looks on the little ones faces – made us really miss our kids and grand kids.

Totally exhausted but just so so happy, we headed back along the river where restaurants and bars were also open - a magic city.

### **Sunday 10th December**

Woke up to a very foggy morning - so thick we could barely see the motorhome next door and left at about 11am and the fog was still thick with no sign of lifting for another couple of hours.

Didn't see much of the countryside today and even after the fog lifted, it was a cloudy and dull day - just for a change.

### **[El Puerto de Santa Maria - Spain](#)**

#### **Our Campsite for tonight: Parking Pasarela, El Puerto de Santa Maria**

Had our sights set on going to Cadiz today so selected this campsite as it was only a short 20 minute catamaran ride from here to Cadiz.

Again a large mixed riverfront park with the catamaran departure point and the centre of town just across a small footbridge.

Headed off to get the timetable for the boat departures and found that on Sundays there are only a few – (many more on work days the sign said!).

We had missed the 2pm boat and as the next was not leaving till 5pm so decided to explore this small village.

Strangely they have an old castle right in the centre of town (normally they are on top of a hill but this one was closed on Sundays).

Orange trees again a feature of the castle square.

Walked the streets to find the ultimate degustation site and finally found the one where all the locals hung out.

Tasted several tapas that were absolutely delicious and spent an enjoyable afternoon with the locals and the waiter who was excellent before leaving to catch our boat.

Wouldn't you know it - just as we were arrived at the terminal, the rain came down, the wind began to howl and the dark clouds loomed overhead.

Maybe today was not a good day to visit Cadiz after all!.

### **Monday 11th December 2017**

#### **Puerto Santa Maria - Spain**

Woke up before midnight by the sounds of heavy rain on the roof and wind gusts that sent Ziggy seriously rocking.

Did not wake up my driver who happily snored through all the noise and rocking.

Needless to say the navigator did not get any further sleep.

Heard on the news in the morning that the storm caused lots of damage in this town and surrounding areas.

Many trees were uprooted and roofs blown off.

I remember looking out in the wee hours of the morning and seeing waves coming down the river - very scary.

Did not attempt to go to Cadiz this morning as the weather was still foul and the wind gusts too heavy to think about a trip to Cadiz by boat.

Our next stop and planned camp for the night was the town of Tarifa.

The campsite was just a short walk from the town centre and beach but the campsite was not much more than mud because of the overnight storm and the surrounding area was to us, a little suspect.

A few undesirable people lurking around when we stopped to have lunch so decided to give this a miss and move on.

The hills around Tarifa offered views across to Morocco but because of the bad weather could not get a clear view across the ocean.

We have decided not to go to Morocco as our phone plan does not cover us there and were concerned about being stuck somewhere without phone or Internet.

We currently have an unlimited Telstra phone plan that covers us for most of Europe but does not include Morocco.

The next part of our journey takes us directly along the coast roads through southern Spain.

Soon we see the Rock of Gibraltar in the distance - a massive rock with towering apartment blocks and buildings everywhere.

### [de la Concepcion - Spain](#)

#### **Our camp for tonight: Parking, La Linea de la Concepcion**

We arrived here at around 3.30 pm and the weather had now cleared to just an overcast sky.

The campsite is situated at a marina on the Spanish/Gibraltar border with magic views of high end sailing boats just a few metres away.

Wow just beautiful – brings back great memories from our sailing days.

Left the marina soon after arriving and headed through customs into Gibraltar only a 15 minute walk away across the airport run way – glad no landings and take-offs whilst we were crossing???

We did not do more than show our passports to customs before entering this new country.

Soon found out that they only take British Pounds here and as we only had Euros, that was going to be a problem unless we used credit cards – our Com Bank Travel Cash Card was rejected by 2 different bank ATMs so gave up.

Didn't take long to get to the centre of town and were very disappointed to find that Gibraltar was just like a Little Britain in Spain.

There was pretty much only one long Main Street which was predominately made up of jewellery shops, tobacco and alcohol outlets and of course British fish and chip shops.

Don't know why the Brits would travel all the way to Spain and then congregate with other Brits and sit around and eat British style food and drink British beer – they could have done that at home.

There was even a Marks and Spencer to make them feel at home.

Found nothing of interest here for us so headed back to Spain at nightfall so we could get some Spanish food and talk to some locals.

#### **Tuesday 12th December**

A truly beautiful sunny morning greeted us and the views across the marina were nothing more than spectacular.

### [Mijas - Spain](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Cala de Mijas, Mijas**

This is a very touristy town again full of Brits.



Everyone speaks English here including all the staff in shops and restaurants.

The beach is just beautiful with a boardwalk running along the oceanfront for miles.

Apartment block after apartment block with ocean views hanging over the boardwalk and bars and restaurants cater for everyone mostly with English type menus.

The campsite provided by the local council is on the edge of a massive car park with a huge area in the middle where a huge market is held on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

There was a wall of motorhomes here when we arrived and we were very lucky to get a spot. Spent the rest of the day walking through town and along the beachfront boardwalk.

### **Wednesday 13th December**

Considering there were around 80 motorhomes here overnight, we had a beautiful quiet restful night.

Did not hear a sound until around 8.30 am when the vendors drove in to set up for the market just across from us.

Didn't really need anything but decided to visit the market.

This is one of the best markets we have seen so far.

Shoes and clothes in particular were really high quality and at a very reasonable cost.

Very tempted to buy lots but held back and only got distracted by some items we purchased for the grandkids.

Just as well we will be able to offload these to our girls to take home when they visit us next year.

Met some really great motorhomers here including a couple Brian and Wendy from Bribie Island.

This is their second trip here - the first being two years.

Left a lot later than we expected after my driver also known to me affectionally as "Mr Have A Chat" couldn't tear himself away from having a chat with anyone walking by - didn't matter what nationality, if English or German didn't work then sign language did 😊.

I remember watching him speaking to a Spanish gentlemen the day before - the Spanish gentlemen couldn't speak English - Rob couldn't speak Spanish - both could speak German - sign language did the rest - just so beautiful to watch - poetry in motion!

Our journey today took us along the coast road where the views were spectacular.

So many towns and villages along the way with thousands upon thousands of apartment blocks on the beachfront or in the hills overlooking the ocean.

The landscape was really interesting as we passed through the mountains.

It was now getting quite late in the afternoon and the sun setting over the hills provided some spectacular photo opportunities.

The hills for kilometre after kilometre were terraced with hothouses taking up every available space on the hillsides and in the valleys.

Not sure what they are growing here but think oranges and tomatoes - will check tomorrow.

The hothouses really spoiled some of the magic views along the coastline.

### Castelle de Ferro - Spain

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Tropic Autocaravanas, Castelle de Ferro**

We descended quickly from the hills to the ocean front where this campsite dedicated for motorhomes sits right on a white stony beach.

Not many here compared to our last stop and most motorhomers are European not English, mainly French, as the campsite is managed by a young French couple.

It was almost sunset when we headed down to the beachfront and walked to town.

Just magic views as the mountains were awash with part sun and part shade providing an artists palette of different shades of brown and green - the white clouds hanging over these finishing off a wonderful picture to try to capture.

Sadly many of the apartment blocks under construction look like they have not been worked on for many years.

The little town was alive with locals enjoying the sunset.

Such a beautiful little unspoilt place with still lots of tradition.

#### **Thursday 14th December**

Woke up to another gorgeous day so were eager to head off as soon as we filled with water and emptied the "unmentionables".

Others were waiting so we quickly moved off the service area while we entered our GPS co ordinates for our next stop for the night.

Tap, tap at the window - opened the driver's window and heard the words "shut down your engine".

No hello, good morning or please, just this arrogant male person with a French accent insisting we turn off the engine.

We had only been there for about 30 seconds.

My driver did not take kindly to this unwarranted and rude request and casually turned around to the person at the window and said "No I won't".

His French jaw dropped considerably. He then said "You are gassing us with your engine fumes"

His motorhome was at least 40-60 metres from us. My driver just ignored him.

He was the same person we saw just after we had checked in and were heading out on a beach walk, not knowing we could see him, walk over to Ziggy and do a "number plate check" – a game that is "played" at all sites in Europe so he knew for sure that we had GB plates.

We finished entering the coordinates and took off leaving this rude person just standing there.

Cannot say the words in writing uttered by my best friend and driver !!...??...

We think the only people who like the French are the French people.

We have heard so many comments from fellow international travellers from every country, and I am sorry to say none have anything nice to say about these people.

Enough said and moving on - again!!!

We headed high up into the mountains where the countryside had very few trees, mostly shale and low scrubby bushes.

Reminded us very much of the countryside whilst going through the Mohave Desert towards the Grand Canyon in the USA where absolutely nothing could grow successfully and if you ventured through it on foot, am sure you would find nothing but rattle snakes.

There are miles and miles of hothouses called "polly tunnels" (because they look like huge plastic tunnels joined together for acre after acre) and are for growing a multitude of crops in these dry arid conditions.

Mostly tomatoes and orange trees but have even seen grape vines under these as well as many other crops.

There are so many thousands of these that they actually spoil the scenery and many towns are actually scattered amongst the polly tunnels where every spare inch is used for agriculture.

## [Almeria - Spain](#)

### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking Cabo de Gato, Almeria**

Another absolute beachfront campsite with just a short boardwalk separating us and the magnificent turquoise coloured Mediterranean Sea.

The walk down the boardwalk took us past several seafront restaurants with very few still open at this time of year.

The small town consisted of really beautiful two to three storey homes and no apartments.

So unspoilt by tourists compared to many towns we have seen.

The homes were well maintained and it was obvious the home owners here were houseproud.

Strangely we noticed that most women here were Muslims.

To the left of the campsite, small and medium sized fishing boats lazed on the beachfront and small fishing shacks were scattered amongst the boats.

At the very end was a huge tower, now in ruins and adjacent to this and nestled among the fishing boats was an old seafood restaurant and bar.

The only sign of "real life" in this town was here with mostly locals in the bar.

We sat and watched people come and go and after a couple of drinks asked for the menu.

They do not have a menu as such and the barman took us to a window filled with fresh seafood and all we had to do was point to what we wanted and they cooked it.

Just magnificent sitting here with the waves crashing only a couple of metres away.

The restaurant stayed open until sunset and then closed its doors for the day.

They are open every day but closed at night.

### **Friday 15th December**

Again we travelled along the coast and through mountains with more and more polly tunnels absolutely everywhere.

They obviously work here but would hate to think of the impact of the plastic waste at the end of the day.

Chiselled mountains and desert like plains were everywhere with towns scattered in between - very interesting landscapes - rugged but picturesque.

### **[Aguilas - Spain](#)**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Playa de los Cocedores, Aguilas**

Another magic find set high above and overlooking several coves and secluded beaches.

This remote and craggy site was beautiful and quiet where unique outcrops of limestone hills bordered the sea and beaches.

Several caves were sculptured into the limestone rock face and some of these were more than one room each.

Obviously very popular in the summertime as there were two bars here but neither had been opened for some time.

There are nature walks starting here which take you for a 2 - 3 hour round trip walk through the hills and coves and beaches and through quaint villages.

Experienced the most spectacular sunset here with shades of pink and orange and gold and purple over the deep blue sea.

### **Saturday 16th December**

Another magic day but a little windy.

Passed by a spectacular golf resort - an oasis in the desert.

Massive clubhouses and several towers of apartments in the middle of nowhere.

Avoided the motorway today and headed further inland for a short while.

Added 50kms to our trip but the scenery was really worth it.

Fruit and vegetable pickers were out in full force.

Felt so sorry for them as they were bending over picking what looked like cabbages.

They had huge buckets strapped to their backs and these were filled to capacity and then deposited into large containers.

### **Cabo de Palos - Spain**

#### **Campsite for tonight: Cabo de Palos**

Another magic spot just below the lighthouse with views across Costa Blanca.

A 10 minute walk around the seafront took us past some majestic homes with seafront swimming pools (all with shutters and iron bars on lower windows and doors).

This led to a secluded harbour full of sailing and pleasure craft.

Restaurants and bars perched on the boardwalks bordering the harbour were all open and busy.

Spent a wonderful sun drenched afternoon sitting at one of these and enjoying this magic spot.

### **Sunday 17th December**

Can't believe how lucky we have been with the weather.

Just another beautiful sunny day as we set off now heading north on the eastern side of Spain.

Beginning to sound like a cracked gramophone - probably am already as everything in Spain and Portugal has been fantastic - beautiful people, beautiful country, great food, fabulous weather and so many wonderful campsites with many being with the compliments of the local area - though at all times we give back by shopping, eating and drinking where possible.

### **Alicante - Spain**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Platja Altet, Alicante**

Again we are right on the beachfront where fishermen are lined up and down the beach.

Sat in our deck chairs in the beautiful sunshine reading for some hours before setting off along the boardwalk.

No town close by here but this strip contains around 50+ high rise apartment blocks and of course restaurants and bars to service them.

Wind sprang up and once the sun began to hide behind the apartment blocks, it was time to step up the pace and head home.

We sat in the front seat until the remaining sun disappeared and watched the keen fishermen braving the cold. Not once did we see anything being caught.

### **Monday 18th December**

Woke up to a chilly 8 degrees inside - hate to think what it was outside. The sun was up and the fishermen were again trying their luck but have to admit they were clad in super warm gear with beanies and gloves and boy did they look cold.

Lots of agriculture everywhere with citrus trees dominating the landscape.

Might pick a fresh orange from a tree before we leave this area, they look so inviting and I am sure they wouldn't miss just one!

NAVIE was taking us through the mountains and mountain passes and we are now a long way from the sea. We thought that as we were avoiding toll ways this was the only way around.

Didn't even think the co ordinates were wrong but they were seriously wrong.

Checked our maps and found that we were further away than when we started.

Not happy "Jan" - everything had been travelling so smoothly until now so unhappily we headed back towards the coast and arrived at our destination very late in the afternoon.

### **Calpe - Spain**

**Campsite for tonight: Camping Estrella Polar, Calpe (correct co ordinates 38.658566 0.077668)**

Arrived at the seaside town of Calpe where houses and apartment blocks were literally steeped all the way down the mountainside (very spectacular) and then down into the valley to the touristy town.

This campsite is on the other side and a few kms outside of Calpe.

Nothing spectacular (view wise) this time.

A small but well laid out motorhome park not very far from beach or town but given our extra long day driving, we decided to sit and enjoy what was left of the day.

There was a small on site bar and restaurant so the Ziggy chef got the night off and we ordered a seafood paella for 7pm.

The campsite was run by a beautiful young Russian girl, Olga Ivanova, her partner and a chef who has lived in just about every country on earth.

They deserve to do well – they have a great setup with the bar and restaurant on-site.

We had the best paella we have had by a long shot with the chef and the owners joining us for a truly wonderful night.

### **Tuesday & Wednesday 19 & 20 December**

Said our goodbyes and left without visiting the town or beach - very rare for us not to explore each place we have stayed.

Told the owners about the incorrect co ordinates and hope they rectify this as I am sure they would be missing out on business because of it.

Had another bad co ordinates day today with the first place we chose incorrect and when we finally found it - no way were we going to stay there.

Next choice again was too isolated with no other motorhomes there so decided it was a security risk so moved on.

### **Castellon de la Plana - Spain**

#### **Campsite for two nights: El Grao de Castellon, Castellon de la Plana**

Really tired now after two long days of frustrating co ordinate mistakes in the NKC APP.

Insisted we stop here for a couple of nights and my driver did not argue.

This campsite is a credit to the community here.

It is right next to a beach and Port with the town centre a short 15 minute walk away.

The larger town of Castellon is just 4 kms away with a bus running every half hour.

Internet was provided here so spent a couple of restful days soaking up the sunshine, reading, relaxing and of course making use of the Internet.

The Port area and harbour was fascinating with many large cargo vessels in and the marina housing a vast number of very large sailing and pleasure craft. The harbour boardwalk again lined with restaurants and bars - though only a couple were open.

We befriended a German couple Walter and Christa who parked next door to us and we spent many hours talking about our combined travels.

They have a purpose built 4WD motorhome and have taken this across the high seas to every imaginable country around the world - some places we would never even attempt to visit, let alone go by motorhome.

Hope to catch up with them when we return to Germany next year.

## **Thursday 21st December**

Today, we decided to stay well away from large cities as it was Election Day in Catalonia.

Heard there may be some strife regardless of the outcome as Catalonia is voting on whether to break away from Spain or staying within – if they vote to break away could have some interesting implications in the Schengen Zone.

### **Amposta - Spain**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Casa de Fusta, Amposta**

A very interesting place set amidst rice fields at the mouth of the Delta.

Rice had been harvested so all that was remaining was muddy looking water - not very pretty and we began to think we had selected another dud.

The campsite was an oasis in a desert of rice fields.

It is a nature park with bird watching one of the many activities provided here.

A purpose built tree house provided an excellent viewing platform and even though there was no rice growing, very picturesque.

All sorts of varieties of birds flying about and wading in the water.

They also have an aviary here including a pheasant and turkeys and ducks as well as an assortment of animals.

The restaurant and cafe was well utilised with lots of patrons eating some very strange types of food (Spanish delicacies, I think).

This place would be booming in summertime as they have so many hire bikes, trikes, tandems, row boats and horse drawn carriages to keep you occupied.

A really worthwhile spot that was so interesting.

## **Friday 22nd December**

We are back into the wine districts again and vineyards are now replacing citrus trees .

Wine producers here mostly making cava (not to be confused with the awful muddy drink of the same name from Fiji).

We are yet to taste this wine but believe it is predominately made into a sparkling white or rose and a Spanish version of champagne (don't mention that word to the French).

### **Vilafranca del Penedes - Spain**

#### **Our Campsite for tonight: Vilafranca del Penedes**

A mixed parking area with 10 spots available for motorhomes at the bottom of a hill just outside of the town centre.



We are being very cautious about places we are parking in as we get closer to Barcelona.

We have heard some horrific stories of break ins and vandalism to motorhomes in the Barcelona city area.

Only a small town centre with again a very large cathedral in the centre. It is quite strange that with Xmas only a couple of days away, there does not seem to be a lot of the Xmas spirit here.

In the centre of town they had erected a temporary ice skating rink under a large tent.

The local kids were having a ball with parents looking on and taking happy snaps.

Strangely the music they used was 60's English spoken rock music.

Was a lot of fun to watch.

Felt very safe and comfortable here as we were joined by a half dozen other motorhomes.

## **Barcelona - Spain**

### **Saturday 23rd December**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Campo de Futbol, La Colonia Guell (20 mins to centre of Barcelona)**

Wanted to stay in the centre of Barcelona for Xmas but were scared off by comments in our camping APP warning of break ins and vandalism to motorhomes day and night so opted to stay out of town and travel to the centre by train instead.

Good decision, as the campsite is only 5 minutes walk to the train station and from there only 20 minutes into the centre of town.

Secured Ziggy and took most of our electronic and computer gear with us in our backpacks.

Ziggy has security alarms and extra door locks but from what we have heard, not much puts off these thieves.

First obstacle was working out how to buy tickets and where to get off but with the help of a local, we purchased a single ticket each, one trip, two zones at a cost of €3 each and 20 minutes later arrived at Pl. Espanya right in the heart.

Once out of the Metro station, we stood with mouths open and took in the absolutely fabulous surroundings.

First step was to find a tourist office with maps and brochures and from there hit the tourist trail.

The Complex de Arenas was on one side of Pl. Espanya and on the other the magnificent Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.

Loud music attracted us toward the museum which is at the top of the third level overlooking the entire centre square.

Several steps took us to the second level which is a square on its own and here stilt walkers and floats themed as "Arabian Nights" floated" around the square led by costumed musicians.

Armed with maps now, we walked all day taking in some of Barcelona's best attractions including Casa Mil or better known as La Pedrera (the Quarry) - a masterpiece building designed by Gaudi between 1906 and 1912 for a wealthy businessman and his wife.

It has a breathtaking wavy facade of stone and iron balconies.

The most outstanding spaces of this building are the rooftop, and interior courtyards - a huge attraction.

Next another half hour's walk took us to Sagrada Familia, first built in 1883 - Gaudi was commissioned to continue building this temple and today, it continues to be constantly added to.

Tall cranes appear high above the temple where construction is continuing with no fixed completion date. This has to be the most gob smacking building we have seen in our travels and we have seen some absolutely amazing ones.

Rates as one of the top 10 cathedrals in the world.

We stood in awe of this building for so long and took photos from every angle.

Finally totally exhausted, think we must have walked 20kms today, we opted to catch a taxi back to Pl. Espanya where we ducked into a very busy restaurant and bar and sampled some more tapas and were entertained by a local group having an early Xmas party.

Getting dark now, we headed back to the Metro and took the train home.

### **Sunday 24th and Monday 25th December**

Felt a little uneasy about staying around Barcelona for Xmas though we could have spent another week sightseeing here.

Wanted to find a place in a medium size town to camp and enjoy the local festivities for Xmas but the first place we selected was fully booked out when we arrived.

Our next choice was Gerona - the campsite was closed on Sundays and public holidays so we headed back to the coast to a small seaside town.

### **Palamos – Spain**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Autocaravanning Palamos, Palamos**

A really great campsite set on three plateaus, the top one having views across to the sea. The office was closed for midday siesta but the sign said to park and to check in when the office reopened at 5pm.

All three plateaus were booked from Xmas day onwards, so no luck there.

Found a spot which was not marked with a number but was in a great sunny location away from the others so we happily moved in and spent the next two days relaxing, drinking and eating some of those great prawns we found and froze a few days before.

Decorated Ziggy with tinsel, put on our Santa hats and set the twinkling lights ablaze.

The cava (Spanish bubbly) was excellent.

Sent away all our Xmas emails, skyped and spoke to our girls and grandkids and celebrated a truly wonderful Xmas with my driver, my best friend and the love of my life.

(PS – we found out later that all the emails we sent to addresses that ended in bigpond.com or bigpond.net did not get through for some reason??? – don't know why – one of the many vagaries of comms we have found in Europe).

### **Tuesday 26th December**

Left Palamos on Boxing Day and headed back to Gerona.

Still a public holiday here so no supermarkets or major shops are open today.

### **Girona - Spain**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking Vayreda La Devesa, Girona (or sometimes known as Gerona)**

An inner city motorhome park which was a little difficult to get into because of the narrow one way streets and with cars parked on both sides left Ziggy and my driver with only one or two cms to get through.

It was seriously cold and windy so rugged up and headed into town using the Spanish map given to us by reception.

Garcon tried really hard to interpret it for us but he had no English and we had no Spanish so we thanked him, smiled and set off.

Saw a massive market on the way in so firstly headed toward this.

Nearly every person selling and buying were Muslims and we found out later it was a special Muslim Market only.

Went for miles and miles selling fresh fruit and veges and clothes etc.

Wasn't difficult to follow the map and soon we saw the steeple of Basilica De Sant Feliu in the distance.

We came by the Riu Onya which is a waterway splitting the commercial area we were in from the Old Town. Wow - the buildings on both sides were three to five storey apartment blocks, all painted in different subtle colours and looked just stunning and picturesque - reminded us a little of the area near the Ponte Vecchio in Italy.

We stood in the middle of the first pedestrian bridge and saw several other bridges criss crossing over the river - all different and most with fairy lights strung across them.

Beyond the last bridge we could see the town's massive Xmas tree.

The Historic Old Town, a medieval city, showcased buildings dating from the 10th to the 13th century.

So many wonderful old buildings including the Basilica, la Catedral, the Archeological Museum just to mention a few were just so interesting.

The Xmas spirit was certainly here with buildings and shops all decorated with Xmas lights.

Tucked in behind the Rambla de la Libertat (the colourful row of up to five storey apartments mentioned before) were outdoor restaurants eager to capture the tourist dollar.

We spent our tourist dollars with a meal (paella of course, but nowhere as good as the one we had a few days earlier) and a large beer to wash it down with.

It was now too cold to stay longer so we very quickly headed home.

Though this campsite is in the middle of the commercial city, it was very safe and quiet and would highly recommend it.

Girona was our last stopover in Spain and we have so many wonderful memories to take home with us from this country. We found the people eager to assist and super friendly.

We had absolutely no issues with feeling unsafe at any time. Thank you Spain and Portugal - we had a great time.

## France

### **Wednesday 27th December**

Back to France again today with no one at the border to check passports.

Shops on both sides of the border were extremely busy as this was the first shopping day after the Xmas holiday.

We could see the Pyrenees in the distance with a heavy layer of snow on top of the mountains.

Had absolutely no thoughts of heading in that direction - not ready to ski yet - will leave that till next winter.

As we travelled further into France, the mountain tops on one side hosted dark green thunderous clouds - looked seriously like hail - and in the far distance, heavy rain or snow and through the middle of this, a rainbow - looked like all seasons in one ahead.

Soon light sleet began to fall and the wind howled and was seriously pushing Ziggy around.

My driver had both hands on the wheel to steady the Ziggy bus and keep her on the road.

We decided to find a campsite ASAP.

### Port Vendres – France

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Aire de Camping Car L'Anse des Tamarins, Port Vendres**

A great little harbour front campsite, tucked in behind a hill so thought we were protected here.

The rain had stopped for a short while so took the opportunity to take a walk to the town which by all reports was really great.

Only got 50 paces away and looked across the harbour to see those green black clouds rolling in from the sea straight for us.

Took a couple of snaps and back home to ride out the storm.

Several hours later after being buffeted around with wind and rain, it cleared long enough to go for a short walk.

This is a working Port and is quite busy.

The view across the harbour to town is very picturesque with lovely homes and apartment blocks scattered over the hill facing the harbour.

Didn't make it all the way round as the rain came back so unfortunately cannot report on the town.

The wake up call next morning was a treat, with two young gendarmerie collecting the camping money.

I was ready with money in hand at 8am, my driver was still recovering from the drive the day before.

Got to say the gendarmerie were lovely and very easy on the eyes!!

### **Thursday 28th December**

Must have had a huge snowfall on the Pyrenees overnight, as the mountains were covered in snow this morning.

Still an overcast windy day today so the view was not as special as it could have been.

The hillsides and valleys are full of vineyards.

None have any green on them and all look ready and waiting for spring.

### **Narbonne – France**

### **Our campsite for tonight: Aire de Campingcar de la Narbonne, Narbonne**

The campsite is just on the outskirts of town with just a short 30 minute walk to the beautiful historic old town.

Markets were set up leading into the old town, Xmas goodies being the main items.

Once into Old Town, it was party time with stalls and restaurants selling fast food and drinks on one side of the canal and just over the bridge, a fairyland of rides including a huge Ferris wheel delighted young and old.

A short walk from there took us into the main square.

The building was wrapped in a huge red bow and fairy lights dangled down each huge fascia. In the centre of the Plaza, an ice skating rink delighted young and old.

Xmas themes donned every nook and cranny along the cobbled stone streets.

The first area was themed and sponsored by the French Canadians and had tepees and squaws, a mountain man cooking up toffee on a camp stove and delighting the children with toffee on sticks, a two piece Canadian band, farm animals and of course a nativity scene.

One that delighted the children (including the navigator) was a very minor version of Disney's "It's a small world" - just wonderful watching the faces of the little ones.

Finished the day with a glass of Vin Chaud (hot wine with cinnamon- I think) which certainly warmed up the cockles before heading home.

The payment system at the Aire was another piece of French engineering ingenuity aimed at favouring the French and sticking it up everyone else.

One of the main reasons to stay in an Aire is to gain access to the service facilities such as emptying the grey water tank, emptying the toilet cassette and filling up with drinking water, sometimes at additional fees.

The entry gate had a barrier and a machine for payment to enter the Aire – this machine accepted international credit cards and so we paid 12 Euros on our credit card to enter the site – all well and good.

However, when we went to access the service facilities the payment machine would not accept international credit cards – it accepted French cards only and payment in Euros was not available either – French trick No 23B!!!!

Our Australian Mastercards are not accepted as “smart cards” in France – when we go to supermarkets and other retailers we need to sign the sales voucher – when we go to automatic service stations to get diesel they will not accept our cards at all – we have nearly run out of fuel a couple of times because the only service stations that were open were the automatic type ie no staff at all.

On one accession we had to pay a young couple Euros in cash so they could use their credit card for us to get fuel – we were so grateful.

### **Friday 29th December**

Woke up to a miserable cold wet day.

We had such perfect weather for nearly the whole month in Spain and Portugal and have had the opposite since arriving in France.

### Carcassonne - France

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Aire de Camping Car, Carcassonne**

Had read lots about this place and just couldn't wait to explore it.

Our campsite is about 20 minutes walk to La Cite but it is wet and miserable so on with the wet weather gear, neck warmers, gloves, beanies and three layers - feel like Mrs Michellin!

The City of Carcassonne is the largest medieval fortress in Europe and is a masterpiece of military architecture.

Its grandiose appearance, the complexity of its defence system with its double walls, castle and Basilica, all make the Cite de Carcassonne one of the most unique sites we have experienced.

Walking around the ramparts was an indescribable experience.

The inner city is full of restaurants and souvenir shops.

There were so many, it was hard to choose one for lunch.

This is such a must do and unfortunately we could only see it in miserable weather and can only imagine how wonderful it would be in fine weather.

Came back to a couple of shots of vodka to warm up and dried our clothes in our heated drying cupboard.

#### **Saturday 30th and Sunday 31st December**

Watched in amusement as everyone leaving here was having difficulties in getting out.

We had watched someone leaving the night before so had a heads up start.

Every Aire has a different type of payment machine and system – some Aires are run by the Local Council and some are commercial operations.

Certainly makes it more of a challenge when the instructions are in French only.

Got through with no problems at all but as it was so early, we stopped outside the gate and had breakfast there and sat and watched in amusement as others were tearing their hair out - even the French motorhomes were having problems.

Our first choice of campsite was at an Oyster Farm and is a French Passion site.

We were the only ones there and because it was so windy and there was nothing to do, we decided to travel on.

A very long drive today and too many roundabouts left my driver exhausted.

"Don't care if I never see another roundabout" were his words, though I might have left out a few descriptive adjectives here.

## Arles - France

### **Our camp for two nights: Aire de Camping Car, Quai Kalymnos, Arles**

This motorhome campsite is set right on the River Rhone, directly across from the Old Town.

Too late in the day to venture out so sat and watched the view across the river to the Old Town until the light disappeared.

Had a really quiet night with around 30 other motorhomers here.

Think most are staying around for tomorrow night (New Years Eve).

Ventured off soon after breakfast (and a little sleep in).

Had some early sunshine so have learned that you make hay while the sun shines!

A short ten minute walk across the bridge and we were in the centre of Old Town.

Arles dates back to the second century B.C. and has lots of Roman ruins etc.

It has an Amphitheatre that is fairly intact and still hosts bull fights and a theatre, in ruins, which still hosts alfresco performances.

### **Monday 1st January, 2018**

We had waited in eager anticipation to end the 2017 year and the start of 2018.

Ten minutes before midnight, the rain came bucketing down which seemed to end the activities planned for the city.

Fireworks start was delayed by five minutes and only a small number were let loose before more rain saw the end of the celebrations and guaranteed a very quiet New Years Eve.

The morning brought with it perfect cloudless skies, so packed down and headed off for Marseille.

Beautiful scenery along the way as we headed further into the hills and then back down the other side to Marseille.

Saw the Port looming as we came down the mountain and cargo ships way out to sea waiting for their time to come into Port.

The Port was full of ships being loaded and unloaded and cruise ships so tall, they looked like they were top heavy with cabins.

Our NAVIE took us through the Port area where people were everywhere enjoying the waterfront cafes and being a public holiday, was extremely busy.



We ventured through some scary narrow streets and under some really low bridges - the signage not being very clear about where the low bridges were so my driver was really tested and had heart in mouth for several kilometres.

Ziggy is 3.3 metres tall and most of the signage had height warnings of 3.2 metres - we gambled on the fact that there was a fudge factor involved and got through – it was either that or try to reverse up with a lot of frustrated drivers behind us.

Happily we arrived at the campsite (the only one in Marseille) and drove into the driveway with a sigh of relief.

We were stopped from entering by three policemen and behind them some very angry looking motorhomers.

We were not permitted entry and have no idea what was happening but probably some sort of result from New Years Eve.

That was the end of our planned trip to Marseille.

We needed fuel desperately (the low warning light had been on for a while) as we had not planned on using so fuel much getting through Marseille.

Our credit cards do not work in French Express fuel stations and as we had no choice, we pulled into one and waited for someone else to arrive before asking them to use their credit cards in exchange for cash (with a bonus of course for helping out).

Spotted a young couple in a German registered car so opted to approach them.

Turns out they were French with a German registered company car and they spoke German but they were super and helped us out big time and refused to accept a cash reward.

Headed out to the hills asap just to get away from the big city congestion, narrow lumpy roads and people everywhere.

### [Cuges Les Pins - France](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Aire de Camping-Car Le Jardin, de la Ville, Cuges Les Pins**

Hurtling down the highway now leaving all that big city congestion behind, we soon drove through some magic natural countryside.

This camp spot is part of a Natural Parc or to us seemed like our national parks.

Surrounded by hills, woodland and very few houses, it was just bliss.

We were greeted at the entry gate by three very fat goats who followed us right until we parked and then stuck around for a long time waiting for a feed.

Didn't think they needed one so sadly they missed out.

Total serenity and beautiful natural woodland walks is what we needed and we certainly took advantage of this.

Only shared this spot with about six other motorhomes.

The town itself is nothing more than an old country town but just outside of town, a new estate was being built.

The sun hid behind the mountainside fairly early in the afternoon and soon it was quite cold.

Thought back to being home and the camping we really love and this fit the bill, except we couldn't have a camp fire - ugh!!

### **Tuesday 2nd January, 2018**

Slept in this morning and had a leisurely breakfast before heading off through the countryside again and then back to the seaside.

### **[Saint Maxine – France](#)**

### **Our campsite for tonight: Aire de Camping-Car, Saint Maxine**

The campsite is just outside of town, about a 2km hike to the seafront and town.

Because it is close to the beach the campsite was packed with motorhomes.

A really great walk but very windy and cold.

People were everywhere enjoying all the outdoor restaurants and of course because of Xmas, the harbourfront became a theme park for rides and shows to keep the little and big ones happy. Xmas lights and decorations everywhere were fabulous.

A very touristy town with no old town that we could find but hundreds and hundreds of very expensive looking yachts and cruisers were packed into the Marina in the harbour.

When we arrived back, the campsite was filled to capacity, with even a centre lane started where there was no space for a centre line - could be interesting in the morning.

### **Wednesday 4th January, 2018**

Having been to the French Riviera before, we agreed to stay clear this time around so back to the hills for now.

Nice, Cannes, Monte Carlo etc. are places we really enjoyed on a previous trip, but in Ziggy would not be easy.

The scenery today was one of the most beautiful and picturesque we have travelled through.

We travelled through the vast Grand Canyon du Verdon.

Just amazingly beautiful mountains and rock formations towering over a stunning icy blue lake and river.

The roads weaved in and out of the mountainside and after every corner another magic view appeared.

Little hillside towns appeared out of nowhere all built into and forming part of the landscape.

## Entrevaux – France

### Our campsite for tonight: Parking de la Gare, Entrevaux

The campsite is situated in a mixed parking area right beside a train line, but with only one train every hour, and only during the day, was not a problem at all.

This is one of the most interesting medieval towns we have ever seen.

The town is split into two with the train line, a road and a waterway separating the two sides.

The new side is not very interesting but on the other side, you access the medieval town by crossing the waterway via a drawbridge.

Once in the town, the narrow cobbled stone streets showcase a maze of beautiful old buildings. It is so hard to believe people still work and live here - but they do.

Set high on the hill above the old town, is the citadel.

How these are ever built, we cannot imagine as they are built on sheer rock faces.

We started up the steep hill but were blown away by the massive winds sweeping through the valley.

Got halfway up and retreated when the winds were too strong – we were actually blown off our feet not fun on a sharp incline.

Enjoyed a few ales with the locals in the newer part of town before handing back to Ziggy.

We were the only ones there - not surprised but this was a very safe spot but unfortunately open to the windy conditions.

The Citadel was fully lit up high on the mountainside and was spectacular as were the lights and the Xmas tree in the medieval town.

Today was a truly special and wonderful day from start to finish.

### Thursday 5th January

The winds were very gusty throughout the night so we were not unhappy to leave the campsite to escape this the next morning.

We were still in the Grand Canyon so really enjoyed the scenery again.

Would highly recommend the trip to Entrevaux, though it is a tough drive.

This seaside part of France is extremely congested and the roads in and around the major cities were a nightmare.

We opted to avoid these roads after a couple of horrific hours.

No wonder all the cars here have bashes and gashes and busted side mirrors.

We soon gave these roads a miss and took to the A8 tollway for a breather.

When we left the A8 and headed inland to our next destination, we only had 22kms to get there - a breeze, one would think - wrong - zig zag up the steep hill all the way through hairpin after hairpin bend.

Got halfway up and really wanted to give up. There were no places to stop so had to move on. Fortunately the road got better (a little) and eventually we reached our destination.

## **Sospel – France**

### **Our campsite for tonight: Aire de Camping Car, Sospel**

Another quiet spot set just on the edge of town.

Room for only 6 motorhomes and fortunately we were no 4.

There were two parts to the town separated by a river bed but this time with an old town on both sides.

We visited the tourist office who were really helpful and armed with maps, explored both sides.

Very similar to Entrevaux where one part was over a drawbridge with a stone archway and tower leading into the town.

The entrance was so narrow, only very, very small cars or bikes could get across to this part of town.

On the other side, the small square's cathedral is the focal point. Not what we would call a spectacular exterior, however, on the inside, it is really beautiful.

These places are what interests us the most and we just adore exploring and being part of their heritage.

Shared a drink with the locals in the pub before heading back for a well deserved rest.

## **Italy**

### **Friday 5th January**

Not long after leaving town, we saw a police car blocking the road a little way down the mountain.

Two Gendarmes carrying machine guns were stopping cars before us and also coming the other way.

Not sure what the problem was, but they waved us through, thankfully.

This was a very isolated part of the country, so we thought this was very strange. The border was not far away so could have something to do with it.

Another day, another set of challenges for my driver.

Today we opted to head back towards the coast - a different way to yesterday.

We had seen snow on some of the mountains and without snow tyres or chains, did not want to risk this.

Certainly a good choice, though there were still many really tight bends and hairpin corners.

The scenery again was spectacular but my driver had no time to see it.

Our first Italian town driving experience was just awful.

The drivers here are crazy.

They double park and stop anywhere, put on their hazard lights and leave their cars, leaving everyone else to get around them.

Pedestrians just walk or run across pedestrian crossings without stopping or looking and the scooters (millions of them) dart in and out of the traffic like maniacs.

We seriously had forgotten how overpopulated this country is and are seriously wondering how long we want to be here.

Once out of the nightmare town of Ventimiglia (where there was a massive market in the middle of town), we followed the coast road which seemed a little easier, though my driver did not get a chance to see much of the scenery.

The views across the Mediterranean Sea were amazing and a continuous stream of small towns fronted every spare inch of it.

### [Santo Stefano al Mare - Italy](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Parcheggio Marina del Aregai, Santo Stefano al Mare**

Just a beautiful campsite, exclusively for around 26 motorhomes.

It is right on the sea shore with a boardwalk running in front of it.

We have magnificent views and watch the waves come crashing in.

Today is one of the warmest days we have had for a while.

The sun is shining and the skies are blue and we soon forget about the traffic and cars and people.

The walk along the boardwalk goes forever and can't express how much we really enjoyed it.

At home in Oz we can have this magic, every day, and at times we forget to really appreciate what we have - Beautiful white sandy beaches, blue seas and a warm climate.

### **Saturday 6th January**

Rained heavily during the night and woke up to a miserable morning, though the view was still spectacular.

Have opted to take the easy way out and use the toll roads to get us to from A to B instead of going through the towns.

The A8 which also becomes the A10 avoids all the coastal towns but still provides magnificent views along the way of these towns and the sea.

We travelled 80 kms on this tollway for just €11.60 - a real bargain - would have taken us at least three times longer and without the traffic hassle.

Still a wet drizzly day so opted for an interim campsite to stop and do some washing and forward planning.

### [Celle Ligure – Italy](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Area Comunale, Celle Ligure**

Just off the tollway and outside of the town of Cella Ligure, it is a mixed parking area near a sports field.

Nothing much around here and was too wet to walk into town.

Did the chores and settled down for the afternoon with a good book and listened to the rain beating on the roof - quite soothing.

#### **Sunday 7th January and Monday 8th January**

With over 65 million people in this small country (statistics as at 2014), we have elected to avoid travelling along the coast roads and take the tollway which gives us the views, and so much less tension trying to avoid these crazy drivers.

The scooters are not permitted to travel along the tollway so takes one problem out of the driving equation.

Xmas school holidays officially end today, so hope the traffic and the number of people on the roads decrease substantially.

Also the camping fees in the motorhome parks are exorbitant compared to other countries so hopefully these will decrease now that we are in the low season.

The tollways took us through 90kms of freeway, with the most of this going through tunnels.

Once outside of these, the views across to the sea and the mountains were spectacular.

This country is so overpopulated, there is no break in between towns with high rise apartment blocks and homes being built on every spare inch of mountains and hillside.

Very mountainous countryside.

### [Deiva Marina - Italy](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Area de Camping Fornaci Al Mare, Deiva Marina**

The exit off the tollway took us down a steep and windy road with again quite a few tricky bends and under one 3.5m bridge then into this seaside town.

Quite an easy drive down from the tollway compared to past few days.

Another one of those really homely little places where everyone knew each other.

Not much open now that the Xmas holidays are over but we took the time to walk around and find a place for dinner tonight.

Stopped in at the local for a beer and, as is the custom here, enjoyed a plate of snacks complimentary to have with our drink.

We found this in Spain and Portugal as well and is a fabulous idea.

The campsite is a bit disjointed with cabins, motorhomes and caravans scattered everywhere, but we have a whole area to ourselves which is just great.

Mario greeted us at the gate and has been a great host.

Price here yesterday was €32 but today we have it to ourselves for €15 including electricity.

Selected this place because the railway here has a regular train service that takes you directly to Cinque Terre in around 16 minutes and the security is really good with Mario and family living on site, a full security gate and a boom gate - also excellent security lighting.

### Cinque Terre – Italy

Set the alarm for a really early start and did the short 5 minute walk from the campsite to the train platform where we purchased a one way ticket to the first village in the Cinque Terre National Park - Monterosso - only around 4 stops.

At the information counter, we tried to buy the hiking ticket and maps to do the full national park walk to all five villages, but were told the hiking trails were closed because of a dangerous weather alert.

Only option available was to visit each of the five by train and then explore the villages before catching the train to the next village.

Can't say enough about how spectacular each one of these villages was.

Each village was truly amazing and each had their own Monasteries, Fortresses, cathedrals, statues and views to die for.

We walked up and down hills, climbed a thousand steps at each one and walked through quaint fishing villages.

Where in other towns you would have cars, here you see small fishing boats tied up everywhere along the main streets.

Terraced houses many more than 5 storeys high were built on the hillsides and just so colourful.

Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola and Riomaggiore are the other four villages and if we had to choose which we loved the most (and it is a difficult decision) Manarola was our favourite with Vernazza coming a close second.

We probably spent around two hours exploring each village

The bad weather did not actually happen with just a couple of showers during the day.

A little disappointed that we were not allowed to do the hiking trails but wonder now if we would have been fit enough.

This was the toughest day for us physically by far and by day's end we struggled toward the platform to catch the train back to Deiva Marina, staggered the long five minute walk home to Ziggy and collapsed - only having enough energy to open a well deserved bottle of wine and talk about this amazing day.

Got to really encourage people to stay here where it appears to be safer and so close to a train that takes you right to Cinque Terre in four stops.

The town has quite a lot of restaurants and bars and is right beside the sea.

### **Tuesday 9th January**

Heavy rain for most of the night - probably was the bad weather expected yesterday and happening a few hours later than expected.

Back on the tollways now for around 100kms again missing the seafront villages and traffic congestion but still capturing the fabulous views (when not in tunnels).

### **Pisa – Italy**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Area Comunale, Pisa**

We have been very selective with our choices of campsites while in this part of Italy as we have heard some gruesome stories of breakins.

This campsite is in the heart of Pisa in a secure parking area dedicated to motorhomes with security cameras, lots of lights and a person at the entry until 7pm at night.

We are more concerned with leaving Ziggy during the day which is when breakins seem to happen.

Had a pleasant 2km walk to Piazza del Duomo, the famous square that includes Torre Pendente (the leaning tower of Pisa), Cattedrale de Saint Maria and Battistero de Saint Giovanni.

We have not been here in our previous travels and were in awe of these three stunning buildings.

A real tourist atmosphere here even in the "off season".

Everybody taking selfies and professional photographers making sure the photo showed them holding up the leaning tower.



Had to pinch ourselves as we stood in front of another world icon.

Strolled back through the middle of the walled old town until we reached the Arno River.

What a beautiful river with magnificent heritage buildings on both sides and with the sun setting, gave us some fabulous photos to bring back these memories when we get home.

Think we were a little like zombies for the last km of this 4 hour walk - think my driver took me the long way home (on foot).

Strange how one can keep coming back for the pain each day when there is so much to see in this wonderful world and really not enough time to see a small part of it.

Leftovers is all the dinner he got tonight for taking me the long way home 🍔

### **Wednesday 10th January**

NAVIE did not take us via a tollway today so the roads were a little less comfortable (not tollway standard).

Not a lot of fantastic scenery today as we travelled east and away from the coast.

We saw Florence looming in the distance and were a little apprehensive about heading into a big Italian city again but soon had gone through it and we in out campsite without a lot of stress.

### **Firenze (Florence) - Italy**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Parcheggio Gilsomino SCAF, Firenze (Florence)**

One of two campsites in Florence, this has the better and safer rating.

Nothing here makes it a pretty place to stay (no beach or views etc) but its major tick in the box is that the No 11 bus stops right outside the gate and for €2 each and four stops you are right at a bridge on the Arno River with a view across to the next bridge - the Pont de Vecchio.

The views on the river are just amazing and soon we are on the Pont taking in the full atmosphere.

We have been here before and this time, again it is wonderful.

Surprisingly though, all the shops on the Pont are jewellery shops.

We headed into the heart of Florence and ventured through the many many stalls selling leather goods - an absolute treasure for shoe and handbag lovers.

A shopping Mecca with any labels you could wish for.

My driver confiscated my credit cards (joke Joyce - he knows we can't carry more shoes or handbags there is just not enough room in Ziggy).

Just have to say the shoes and boots in both France and Italy have been a real temptation.

Finally found the tourism office with the help of Google and dropped in to get a tourist city map.

Took the required number from the machine and sat and waited for half an hour or more to see an officer.

There were five or six ladies there all busily working on computers.

No. 51 was the last number on a board when we arrived and we were no 52.

Not sure what the problem was - we had had a shower that morning and were clean shaven with clean clothes on - then why did we not get to talk to anyone?

Annoyed we walked out.

Without a map and assistance from this tourist bureau we stumbled on.

The Duomo's (Cattedrale di Santa Maria) red tiled dome was visible from so many places throughout the city.

We passed through many Piazzas and stumbled upon Michaelangelo's Statue of David as well as the Birth of Venus.

This Piazza was the best and was full of amazing statues and so many tourists taking photos - including this tourist bureau unloved couple.

Had a magic day walking about before catching the No 11 bus (next street up from where it dropped us off) and getting home in 10 minutes - feeling all the better for catching the bus instead of walking the 2kms in and out of the city.

### **Thursday 11th January**

We have now seen all on our bucket list for Italy so are now heading south towards Brindisi and then to Greece.

We have previously spent many weeks in Venice and Rome on other trips so will not be revisiting this trip.

No tollways today and highways are pretty good though it is raining and quite miserable outside.

Our campsite chosen for tonight was in a great location on a Marina and the huge Lake Trasimero (Area Comunale, Castiglione del Lago) but all the spots here were so muddy after the rain, we dared not stay here for fear of getting stuck.

Highly recommended if there was no rain.

### **Magione - Italy**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Area Camper Trasimeno, Magione**

There were several other campsites around the lake (all were closed as far as our APP was concerned).

We found one where the barriers were open and based on the signs should have closed on 30th September.

Seems they leave it open for use during the winter months at no cost.

Good fortune for us as the electricity and other services were left open too. There was one other motorhome there.

We happily locked up and went for a long walk around the lake and small town.

This is mostly a fishing village with a seafood coop and a few small shops, a Marina with small fishing boats and a couple of small yachts, a couple of restaurants and a small number of homes.

It was really cold so on went the electric heater (a luxury for us as we don't need to connect to power for the batteries).

Typically the restaurants here close early afternoon and reopen around 7pm, so dressed for the occasion and walked 50 metres to the Italian restaurant.

We were the only ones there and felt guilty.

No one could speak English but they had an English menu and again using sign language and Mr Google we had a fun night with a great Tuscany white and lots of seafood.

Scrambled home in the rain to a warm Ziggy.

### **Friday 12th January**

Rained again during the night and woke up to another overcast and drizzly day.

We headed towards the east coast and after giving the thumbs down to a few dodgy looking camp sites finally chose a safe but uninteresting place to stay.

### **Villa Rosa – Italy**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Azienda Agritouristica Specca, Villa Rosa**

This was a fruit farm just off the main road and tucked safely away behind large gates and the homestead next door.

We were the only ones there.

Really great new facilities and with a "once used tennis court" with lights looking very sad and neglected.

Think it may be used in the summer months only.

Walked a km or so into the small town of Villa Rosa looking for Internet and phone reception as there was no reception at the campsite.

Found a bar open called "Lucky" (the owner a real Marilyn Monroe fan) with pictures of the star on every spare spot on the wall.

Sat and watched the locals come in and play cards - regular Friday night thing here apparently.

A safe and quiet place to stay but nothing exciting to take photos of.

### **Saturday 13th January & Sunday 14th January**

Back on the tollway for a long drive today.

There are hundreds and hundreds of places to stay on the east coast but the ones we saw yesterday were really unkempt and in places that were less than desirable and with no one else staying there, opted to move on further down the boot of Italy.

We travelled about 250 kms on the tollway today and the drive was so spectacular with massive large bridges constructed over the lush green valleys below.

No congestion in this part of the country and for the first time, we are seeing agriculture instead of bricks and mortar.

Our last few days on the tollway have been really worth it and not expensive at all - ranging from €3 to €15 for journeys of up to 100kms.

At a tollway exit we took the cash only aisle instead of the credit card aisle and inserted our first €50 and waited for the change.

We waited and waited and nothing happened and cars queued up behind us so we put on the hazard lights and pressed a "help" button on the machine.

Drivers behind started blowing their horns – Italians are not known for being very patient drivers.

The attendant came to assist and told us we needed more money. We fed in another €50 note and a little change came back out.

This trip cost the Earth at €93.50 and we are still recovering from the shock.

Thought it must have been a special part of the tollway so unhappily we moved on.

Back to the highways tomorrow and give the tollways away.

### **Manfredonia – Italy**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Camping Lido Salpi, Manfredonia**

This campsite is a little heaven compared to others we saw over the last few days.

It is set on the beachfront with a magic view across the ocean to the township of Manfredonia around 10kms away and a backdrop of mountains framing the town in the foreground.

A fabulous picture on dusk with the sun shining on the mountains.

Enjoyed the lolling about at the campsite for what was left of the day and decided to enjoy a meal in its restaurant (reports on our APP gave it a high rating).

We arrived to find a large table of 10 German, Swiss and Austrians already there and Garcon (who was the gardener a couple of hours ago) was just taking their orders.

Knew it was a long wait but enjoyed talking in German with the large table and sipping the good Italian beer.

Was great to see the MasterCard and Visa signs up as we had exhausted most of our cash at the tollway gates.

Dinner came about 2 hours later - think the gardener may have been the chef as well as the waiter.

Tried to pay by credit card but was told the lines were down and we had to pay cash. (Trick no 14B to avoid paying taxes, we think).

Scrounged around and found enough to pay but after the tollway episode, not happy Jan).

The dinner - you guessed it - was just awful.

Lessons learned - ask about credit card before you order and never order from the gardener.

Woke up to a new day, better we hope than yesterday, with no rain today so opted to stay another day and recover.

Took a long walk along a really pretty beach, sadly littered with so much rubbish that would have been washed in on the incoming tides, but it was just wonderful and relaxing.

Looked at the tollway receipt and with Google translation, worked out why the high price yesterday.

Here you take a card on entry at a tollway and then on departure you put the card in and the machine works out how much you need to pay.

On checking the receipt, it includes town of entry and town of departure.

Our entry point stated: "invalid reading" - so obviously our ticket, received at the entry point, could not be read and it charged the maximum amount. Why did the attendant not see this ugh!

We tried to phone the tollway help line, but of course it is only in Italian, so no luck there.

Spoke to an Italian man here who could speak German (no English) and together we agreed we should stop at the next tollway and show them the ticket and ask for a refund.

Ziggy washing and clothes washing and research on Greece took over the rest of the day and of course we did not eat out tonight and really enjoyed a home cooked meal.

## **Monday 15th January**

Had just enough to pay for the campsite (only around €5 left now) so headed to Manfredonia and the nearest ATM.

With money now in hand headed to the next tollway.

They were not authorised to pay refunds and didn't speak English or German, so we took another ticket and moved on hoping to resolve at the departure point.

Here the attendant was also not authorised to pay refunds and directed us to the next tollway where there was an official tollway office who could help.

Long story short - they don't do cash or credit card refunds, only deposit into a bank account.

Took 2 hours (no English spoken) in total to try to do a refund into our Australian bank account- €75+ refund was worth it.

Still not sure if it worked, we will have to wait and see – we were told it would take 2 to 3 months.

Lesson learned: if you have any issues regarding excessive tollway fees, put on your hazard lights and stay put at the gates until a service attendant arrives.

He should be able to sort out the issue on the spot before you leave the gates - too late once you leave the gates as per the above – so don't budge.

## **Ostuni – Italy**

### **Our campsite for tonight: Area Comunale, Ostuni**

Saw the town from miles away - a mass of white buildings sitting atop a hill and the spire of a magnificent cathedral at the summit.

Arrived here with only half an hour until nightfall so did not venture into town today.

The campsite is right at the bottom of the hilltop town and we sat and watched the numerous lights go on throughout the town.

No other motorhome here so we are alone again.

Couldn't understand the parking payment signage - very confusing, but think it is no cost after end of September.

## **Tuesday 16th January**

Our boat from Brindisi to Greece does not leave until 9pm tonight and with only 40kms to go decided to venture into the town of Ostuni to explore.

All the homes and apartments are white or cream sandstone and all are box style, many with little patios and most still with greenery and coloured pots adorning them.

As with many of these towns, the climb is all uphill on cobblestones and steep but really worth it in the end.

In the middle of the town square is a church with the most beautiful and colourful stained glass windows and of course the regulatory statue in the middle of the square.

We climbed higher to the summit which offered breathtaking views across the valleys below and right out to the Adriatic Sea.

The cathedral of course sat at the top of the summit - unfortunately was not open to sightseers.

Beautiful sunny day with blue skies today - the best we have had for weeks, so really enjoyed the travelling.

Arrived in Brindisi with several hours to kill, so parked at the ferry terminal car park and relaxed with a good book until it was time to check in at 7pm.

The ferry was late and we finally left (with about 40 huge trucks and only a few cars) at around 10.30pm instead of 9pm.

Settled into the sleeping lounge (takes about 50 people) and played scrabble and did crosswords until midnight.

We were the only ones in here so enjoyed a quiet peaceful night.

All the truckers slept in the truckers lounge- nice!

### Italy Summary

So this is good-bye to Italy – we really enjoyed our stay here – the food was great, the wine was great and the scenery spectacular – thank you for having us.

When we left the French Riviera and crossed in to Italy the first thing we noticed was an increase in the traffic and particularly the motor scooters – plus an increase in the congestion in towns and the narrow streets.

The Italian drivers are skilful but impatient.

We also noticed how friendly, helpful, smiling and welcoming the Italians are, compared to the country we had just left.

### Greece – the birthplace of Democracy

#### Wednesday 17th January 2018

Ferry details: Grimaldi Lines – Brindisi, Italy to Igoumenitsa, Greece. Travel time 7.5 hours. Cost £200 approx (nearly \$400 AUD).

Greece has a population of around 11 million people, the capital city being Athens and has been a member of the EU since 2001 – there are numerous Greek Islands, 227 of which are inhabited.

A new country, new language, new alphabet, new customs, new food, new driving regulations, new camping regulations, but the currency is still Euros thank heavens – when we first visited Greece in 1978 they still had Drachmas as their currency.

We loved that tour of Greece in 1978 and still talk about it regularly.

Not long after we returned to Australia in 1978 the ABC ran a mini-series titled "Who Pays the Ferryman" which was based on the Greek Island of Crete.

It was a great mini-series and brought back treasured memories.

The day after we saw the first episode we went out and bought the theme music (by Yannis Markopoulos, on vinyl of course).

The TV series may be available on DVD and if you get a chance to watch it you will want to go out and book your tickets to Greece.

Arrived into the Port of Igoumenitsa just as it was getting light which made us happy as we do not like to travel in the dark.

The only passport check was in Brindisi and that was by the ferry company to check if the ticket names matched the passports.

No checks on arrival in Greece.

As soon as we entered Greece we felt much more relaxed after the frenetic pace of Italy.

### [Ammoudia – Greece](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking Ammoudia**

It rained quite heavily along the way however the scenery was special and reminded us of some of the spectacular Fjord views in Norway.

Only travelled 40kms to here from the ferry port.

A very small fishing town but the campsite is right on the beach and beyond that - the ocean.

Fishing boats lined the small waterway beside the beach and were dancing about in the wind and swells.

Crab pots are everywhere in the lagoon.

We had a beachfront uninterrupted view across to the Greek Islands and sat and watched surfers in full wet suits brave the cold for hours on end to tackle what we would call "inferior waves" back home.

Still drizzling and a very cold windy day but we took a short walk around this very small village.

Lots of tavernas and hotels and accommodation to house the millions who would flock here in summer.

Only one taverna that we saw was open.

We sat on the beachfront and enjoyed the view until nightfall.



Around 9pm the wind became much stronger and being out in the open gave us cause for concern so packed down and headed for the protection of the village and nestled in amongst the houses for a peaceful night.

We had encountered a strange looking old man the day before - a Lieutenant Colombo look alike (a little fatter though) with his unkempt long hair and long flowing dark coat.

He stood right beside Ziggy - just smiling.

Rob got out and spoke with Lieutenant Colombo who turned out to be just a very lonely old man who loved to chat to everyone.

He couldn't speak English but his eyes lit up when my German speaking driver spoke to him in German and he responded in German and then I watched as between them, verbal diarrhoea took over.

Apparently quite a few Greeks speak German – hopefully as we are really embarrassed as we can't even say hello or thank you in Greek.

### **Thursday 18th January**

Headed back to the beachfront and enjoyed a leisurely breakfast while watching the surfers again.

Lieutenant Colombo returned again and smiled and waved but this time did not stop to talk.

Our first choice for camp was called Parking Palaitos.

Looked great in the photos.

A beachfront campsite taking only 4 motorhomes.

The little village looked really cosy with lots of tavernas in the Main Street.

Just before we reached the street to the oceanfront, it became very narrow and with cars parked on both sides, we had no room to pass.

We had to reverse back up the hill, do about a 7 point turn and then find a way back out again.

Not much fun and expect this may happen over and over again in our travels.

Sadly we moved on to our next chosen spot.

### **Mytikas – Greece**

#### **Campsite for tonight: Hotel- Restaurant Delphina, Mytikas**

Our App said it was closed but as we passed by it on the highway, the roadside sign said "open" so we followed the track down to the ocean.

The gates were open but once inside, there was no sign of life.

All the deck chairs and umbrellas were stored in the foyer and verandas of the hotel.

Everything was closed.

We decided to stay here in what would be a beautiful paradise setting in the summer months.

Even now with no sun, the views were stunning.

Had a very quiet and peaceful night here by ourselves again.

### **Friday 19th January**

Woke up to a brisk 9 degrees inside Ziggy - brrrr! and turned the gas heater on while having breakfast.

We had passed snow capped mountains in the distance so expected this.

A car drove through the gates and we suspected it might be the owner.

He was a lovely young man, who, together with his parents ran the hotel in the summer months and in the off season lived with his parents on a goat farm nearby.

Evidently the "closed sign" blew off in the wind and he hadn't replaced it.

He had absolutely no problems with us being there and told us about his relations in Melbourne (you guessed it they run a fish and chip shop).

Still overcast but no rain when we headed off.

The road was windy and uphill all the way but what it did was hug the oceanfront which rewarded us with the most stunning scenery across to the islands.

Fish farms were everywhere in every little bay and the fishermen in their little boats, tending to them.

Such a shame the sun was not shining.

Toll roads are something we will have to endure here and are unavoidable in many cases.

Today we encountered our first at €7.50 for only a short distance followed by €3.15 for a couple of kms before we turned off to our campsite.

The cost for motorhomes is 2.5 times the price of cars but strangely a car and caravan is only double the price - can't see the logic here.

### **Kryoneri – Greece**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Strandparking, Kryoneri**

This village is so like the villages we experienced in our last visit to Greece and still talk about now after all these years.

A very small village with just a few houses, some farms on the outskirts and this magic restaurant/taverna right across from the beach on the Patraikos Gulf).

There was a light on inside so ventured in with Mr Google in hand to ask if they were open tonight.

Three people only inside sitting beside a blazing fire - what more could one ask for.

The owner spoke English so didn't need Mr Google's help and soon set a date for 7pm tonight.

This free campsite is within a metre of the waters edge and after scouting around found another spot the same distance to the waters edge but perched directly under a majestic rock face and with even a better view.

The ocean was like a mill pond and for the first time today, the sun came out at day's end giving us a magnificent sunset to capture on camera.

Drove Ziggy the short 100 metres to the restaurant - Captain del Mare ([www.captaindelmare.gr](http://www.captaindelmare.gr)) with the intention of parking in front for the night.

Both campsites were quite isolated and with no one else there, thought this the best option for a peaceful and worry free night.

A couple of tables were already occupied and had taken the fireplace premium seats so we had to take second best.

Even had a Greek Orthodox Priest here - food must be good.

Can only rave about dinner.

For under €30 in total we had a huge plate of home made hommus (warm) to share with fresh bread, grilled octopus and the best seafood risotto plus their home made sweets- like a cheese cake with a honey base pastry and Greek coffee.

Included were a couple of 500 ml bottles of Greek FIX beer - nice.

Highly recommended restaurant and 5 star service with a smile.

### **Saturday 20th January**

Sadly left here but with the knowledge this would not be the last time to experience this Greek hospitality.

The landscape was not as interesting after leaving the mountains and again it was a wet and windy (had our half hour of sunshine yesterday!).

More tolls today with the first being €7.50 and the second €13.30 to go over the newly built bridge from Antirro to Patras and a furthers 16 or so kms.

Magic looking bridge and is really the only option when travelling down the west coast.

To avoid these tolls, an option would be to take the ferry directly to Patras but if you do, you would miss out on Kryoneri and the magnificent scenery (and food) to get there.

Not a lot of options for campsites along here as many are closed for the winter or are so isolated and feel unsafe if we stayed there.

## Kyllini - Greece

### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking Kyllini Beach, Kyllini**

Interesting campsite which is located at a Port and Marina.

The coordinates take you to the middle of the Marina fronting onto the Port but the pictures show the campsite on the adjoining beach.

Parked Ziggy and walked around but could not find any signs allowing motorhome parking anywhere.

The beach sign said parking only between 8am and 10pm - did not want to risk a fine, so went back to the Marina and parked in the front row along with twenty or so cars where the parking was free.

Many cars did not move overnight so expect it is a holding car park for visitors to the islands.

So interesting sitting in the Captains chairs in Ziggy, having a drink and watching the huge car ferries come and go.

The area was alive with many tavernas and restaurants open and was well lit so had no reservations about staying here and watching the ongoing activities around the Port.

The last ferry left at 9pm so had a beautifully quiet night after that and again only heard the beating of raindrops throughout the night.

### **Sunday 21st January**

Raining quite heavily today so decided to take a short trip to a fully serviced campsite.

## Glifa/Ilias – Greece

### **Our campsite for tonight: Camping Aginara Beach, Glifa/Ilias**

Top class place right on a beautiful secluded beach and at this time of year only €13 for the night including electricity and great high speed internet (a rarity).

Only one other caravan here in a huge place that takes more than a couple of hundred.

It has its own small grocery store, a taverna and a beach bar (none of which are open now - sadly).

Would be a real rocking place in the warmer months.

Enjoyed the use of the internet today as we were running short on our monthly Telstra quota.

With rain pelting on the rooftop and winds rocking Ziggy this was thankfully the best place to be.

### **Monday 22nd January**

Woke up to a little sun today for the first time so took advantage of this and did the pile of clothes washing early and hung out to hopefully dry a little before we headed off.

Took a long shower and welcomed the opportunity to use the hairdryer for the first time in months.

Had a blonde moment and hooked up the dryer to a plug and switched her on. Plugged the 2000 watt dryer into the 300 watt inverter power board by mistake and realised my mistake when the dryer immediately came to a grinding halt.

Should have known better from our boating and caravan days and kicked myself hard - the excitement of using the hair dryer took over common sense.

Cooked the inverter we thought, so headed off soon to try to find a place that could help.

### Katakolo – Greece

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking Marina, Katakolo**

Arrived here where the Marina is also a Port for incoming cruise ships.

They dock here and are taken to Ancient Olympia which is around 30kms from here.

Sadly no marine shops with 12 volt electronic gear here, so my driver (who had been just absolutely great about my mistake) set about looking for hopefully only a blown a fuse and not cooked the inverter.

After spending an hour wrapped around the two front seats on the floor, in the most awkward position ( the 2 x 110 AH leisure batteries are under the front seats), he located six fuses (just for the batteries only) and found one blown.

Saved my bacon and for the first time today, I could smile.

A lovely old lady (about my age 😊) walked past and stopped for a chat.

She welcomed us to Greece and wished us a happy holiday (how wonderful).

Later that afternoon, we received a knock on our door and a gentlemen did exactly the same, welcomed us and said he owned a hotel in the town and had some home grown olive oil and other goodies for us if we wanted to come up.

We gratefully declined and thought how special these people were.

Went for a walk about town which reminded us of the cruise ship ports we had experienced in Alaska.

All colourful restaurants and souvenir shops mostly, eager to take the tourist dollar,

Settled in for a quiet night with magnificent views across the harbour and Marina and to the islands in the distance.

### **Tuesday 23rd January**

Happy now that the inverter was fine, we moved on early to visit Ancient Olympia, the site of the very first Olympic Games.

The 30 km trip took us to the town of Archaia Olympia where for a cost of €6, we visited the Museum of Olympia which displays sculptural decorations, many statues (including Hermes) from the temple of Zeus, pottery, jewellery, tools and helmets.

From there we visited the Archaeological site of Ancient Olympia which covered acres including the entrance to the Olympic stadium and the stadium itself, the temple of Hera, altar of Zeus, baths and pools to name just a few.

So unreal to think how they were able to build these without the technology and equipment we have today.

Some of the artefacts on display were dated back to around 4000 B.C.

The city was destroyed by an earthquake in the 6th century A.D.

From there we wanted to visit the Temple of Apollo Epikourios which was another two hours inland from where we were.

We took the scenic drive from Krestena to Andritsaina which took us up and down so many mountains and valleys where the views were more spectacular than one can ever imagine - felt like being on top of the world so many times during this trip which took us up, down and around and back up again so many mountains.

Two hours and approx 50 kms later, we were on top of Mount Kotylin and at the front gates of the Temple only to find the gates closed and chained with a huge lock.

The Temple is shrouded in canvas covers on all sides to protect one of the most important and imposing Temples in Greece.

This was built in 420-400BC.

We could only see the canvas covers from the roadside and dejectedly left to head back down to the coast.

Only 200 meters and around the next corner, we came across what looked like the back end of the hill the Temple was on.

We parked Ziggy and set off up and past some old buildings where we found a large fence which was not padlocked.

Through the fence, we followed a path and soon we were at the bottom of the Temple.

One of the sides of the canvas was open, so we ventured in and took photos before heading out of there as fast as we could and so happy that our trip was not wasted.

Maybe we should have checked if the Temple was open before we headed up.

The trip back was a nightmare as we followed something like a goat track for klm after klm.

We passed through many small villages built on the sides of hills and so many times we came within an inch or two of becoming part of the village walls - they were so narrow.

At one stage, we followed a shepherd and his flock of a couple of hundred or so sheep down a hill for several klms.

I am sure there was a better way back but there was no turning around available anywhere.

We arrived at the coast just as it was getting dark and had no place picked to sleep for the night.

### Kalo Nero – Greece

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Kalo Nero - on the beach N37.297747 E21.695154**

The sunset was magic and finding the beachfront here was a blessing in disguise.

One of the most magic places we have stayed in.

We were right on the beach again with only a few houses and a restaurant and taverna nearby.

We sat for only a few minutes enjoying the sunset and listening to the small waves lapping up on the beach in front of us - then it was dark.

The driver and navigator were exhausted from the last part of the day and the trip back to the coast but Olympia and the Temple of Apollo were amazing.

### **Wednesday 24th January**

Our first task for today was to purchase a SIM card in the nearby town.

Found a park at the beach near the town and walked to the nearest Vodafone store (have you ever tried to find a Greek phone shop – the Greek alphabet makes it harder?).

Our Telstra 4GB for the month is 85% used up and with 18 days to go before the 4GB is refreshed, we needed data.

Found the store without too much trouble and with the help of a very patient and extremely helpful young man managed to get a 5 GB SIM card installed in our dongle for \$42AUD.

Interesting the data lines were down in the Vodafone shop so we had to walk across the road to a dress shop to put the transaction through on our credit card – not sure how all that worked???

We then drove by acres and acres of oranges, mandarins, lemon trees and olive groves – they have been everywhere in Greece.

Couldn't resist stopping at a roadside fruit stall and purchased a huge bag of fresh navel oranges (over 20 in the bag for €3 and a beautiful fresh cauliflower for €1.

Now to find a juicer somewhere.

### [Pylos – Greece](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking Pylos Marina, Pylos**

Interesting little town built on the side of a hill overlooking a huge port and Marina.

The locals park at the Marina during the day but there is room for literally hundreds of cars/buses/motorhomes here.

First time we have seen a motorhome for ages - one only from Belgium.

Took a walk through the village and up the hill to the Greek Orthodox Church.

Magic view of course from here, right across the town, Marina and sea and mountains for as far as you could see.

From there we ventured across to the ruins of a castle on the other side.

Lots of restaurants and tavernas still open at this time of year and many people were about enjoying them.

#### **Thursday 25th January**

### [Kalamata – Greece](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Kalamata Marina, Kalamata**

A Marina is the choice for tonight as we seem always to be drawn to a sea view.

A huge Marina with space for around 10 motorhomes, however again we are alone.

A very safe spot with a security guard continually buzzing around on his little scooter making sure we were okay.

Saw a variety store on the way in so off we went to find a juicer.

Not a lot of appeal to this town but has tons of restaurants along the boardwalk around the Marina - and we found our juicer for all the fruit we have bought.

#### **Friday 26th & Saturday 27th January**

Weather has greatly improved over the last few days and we have had several days of continuous sunshine now.

The scenery is spectacular as we head through the mountains.

So many lovely little villages along the way and we could not resist pulling into a funky little bakery high on a hill overlooking the valleys below.

Greek coffee and home made baklava - so so yummy and oozing with delicious local Greek honey.

We have seen so many bee hives over the last few days.



The architecture has changed dramatically in this area, where the houses and buildings are like miniature castles - made out of stone and mostly perched on the side of cliffs with breathtaking views.

This area is so pretty and really worth the trip down the coastline.

### [Diros – Greece](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking Diros, Diros**

Off the main road now, we go down, down, down past a hillside taverna and further down a steep windy road to the secluded beach.

Nothing down here but crystal clear water quietly lapping the shoreline which is made up of all white stones mostly around 10cm in size.

A touch of paradise in the middle of nowhere.

The bay is steeped on all sides by mountains with just a few houses up high on the hill.

A small number of locals come and go during the day for picnics and some venture out in fishing boats or snorkel.

So tranquil here and for the first time in weeks, out came the chairs and the books as we grabbed a little vitamin D from the sunshine.

Only one other motorhome here during the day but it did not stay overnight.

Interestingly we saw several cars arrive during the two days and the occupants disappear into the bushes hunting around for something.

They were carrying plastic shopping bags and collected bits off low shrubs.

One beautiful elderly man stopped to chat and offered us some of what they were collecting.

Looked like very very thin asparagus around 20 cms long and tasted a bit like raw green peas.

He didn't speak English but we got the gist that whatever it was - was good for the eyes - anyone know what it might have been?

Had two wonderful days here and imagine it would be packed in the summertime.

No services here except for rubbish bins – just one of those great wild camping spots.

#### **Sunday 28th January**

Decisions, decisions, decisions.

Do we head further south now (the road is marked as a scenic road) or do we head toward the east coast ?

Finally opted to head east and soon (with the help of a great road and not too many mountains to climb) arrived at our next destination at the Dimitrios Shipwreck just south of Gythion.

The town itself looked like a great place to stop along the seafront and the shipwreck is only a couple of kms from the town.

The parking area is on the seafront right next to a restaurant (closed for winter) but unfortunately looked like a hangout for young locals.

Picked a few fresh lemons from a tree beside the restaurant and headed off – Our policy is that when wild camping if either one of us does not feel safe we head off – we also look for tyre burn outs and discarded alcoholic drink bottles – if present we don't stay.

### [Trinisa - Greece](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking Ekklesia Ai Glannakis, Trinisa**

Only another few klms away we found the ultimate little Greek fishing Village with just a taverna and a small fleet of fishing boats (about 10) and the smallest church we had come across – nothing else not even houses.

Parked Ziggy and walked over to the fishermen who were cleaning octopus (catch of the day).

Drawn by the Greek music and the locals sitting outside the taverna, we ventured inside to grab a beer.

There was a fire raging and the small taverna which would only hold around twenty people was filling quickly.

We grabbed a table and the rest of the afternoon soon disappeared.

Had the best afternoon ever with the locals.

Ate like kings - fresh fish - Greek salad - and way too many Ouzo's.

Many of these Tavernas don't have menus – the cook leads you into the kitchen and then shows you what is available – you point at what you want and put up either 1 or 2 fingers for the number you want – we are so embarrassed that we can't speak a word of Greek – these people are so nice – it doesn't matter - they just smile and all is ok.

We had to pinch ourselves – we thought we had gone to heaven – brought back so many great memories of our last holiday in Greece – nothing seems to have changed here in the rural and coastal villages.

Apart from not having menus they have an unusual way with the rest of proceedings.

As you eat and drink many plates and bottles accumulate on the table and they are not cleared away.

When you say you want the bill, the waiter comes over and counts the plates and empty bottles and then writes the total down on a piece of paper and it is never a big bill.

Then the waiter removes the empty bottles and upends the scraps and leftovers from the plates in to the middle of the table – the table cloth is a paper overlay which the waiter then wraps up and takes to the bin.

Received gifts of fresh mandarins from one of the fishermen and fresh oranges from the restaurant owner.

The restaurant was filled to more than capacity all afternoon and did not clear until nightfall.

We sit here now at 7.30 pm and everything is in darkness – heaven once again.

### **Monday 29th January & Tuesday 30th January**

Woke up to another magic Greek sunrise after a wonderfully peaceful night. Blue skies, no wind and not a cloud anywhere to be seen.

Travelled from the west coast to the east coast today. Hard to believe things could get any better but they did.

### **Monemvassia – Greece**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Monemvassia**

Again on the waterfront at a small village with a small fishing fleet and port for larger vessels.

A huge parking area is provided for locals and restaurant goers and of course motorhomes.

A very touristy place, however in the winter months, not as busy with many of the restaurants and tavernas closed for the season.

The ancient city of Monemvassia is just a short 15 minute walk across to the island directly opposite the Marina.

Wow - what a surprise.

We saw the castle and church perched atop the mountain but it was not until we were half way around the other side, did the ancient city come into view.

It has been mostly restored now and houses lots of very classy old hotels and restaurants.

The restored buildings have been done very effectively and in the style of the old ruins which are still nestled amongst them.

There are several levels of buildings built into the mountainside with narrow cobbled streets, just wide enough to walk along - no cars or bikes are permitted so everything is brought in and out by wheel barrows.

We saw the porters bringing in fresh linen for the hotels - yes in wheel barrows.

All rubbish is taken to the front entry of the town - beyond the entry gate.

Took a good part of our day as we strolled up and down and through the many levels - what a hoot!

Such hot thirsty work all this mountain climbing - just had to stop at a rooftop taverna and sample the wares whilst overlooking the breathtaking ocean views than went forever.

Another beautiful sunny day next day so opted to stay on.

Only a couple of motorhomes here overnight with our neighbour (Ben) being this amazing 83 year old Danish man who had been travelling in this same motorhome for 42 years.

He lost his wife 12 years back but still travels to Greece for six months every year.

He was quite excited today as he was receiving his new dentures.

Evidently he threw the old pair out accidentally in the rubbish and has been waiting for 6 weeks for new ones.

Decided to have a nice lunch today - really hankering for some more fresh seafood - so after a long walk around the village - stopped back at the closest restaurant to us on the pier.

No seafood would you believe - so Garcon recommended the second last restaurant at the end of the bay - a cousin, I think??

Kosta was his name - couldn't tell you the name of the restaurant as it was written in Greek.

We sat outside - across the road from the kitchen - and were served the best grilled calamari we have ever had.

A whole calamari sliced thinly and grilled and flavoured Greek style. Yum.

Bought an amazing chocolate covered mouse from a bakery on the way home - which we had after a light dinner.

### **Wednesday 31st January & Thursday 1st January**

Could have stayed on for more days here but we have so much still to see so opted to move on.

Ben had told us about this super place not far from here so took his advice and headed in that direction.

### **Port Limenas, Geraka – Greece**

#### **Port Limenas, Geraka - ancient ruins of temple of Zanez**

Only about 20kms from Monemvassia and a very pleasant drive through the mountains, we arrived at this small one road in and one road out - quaint but small waterfront village with a church and a few houses and some waterfront tavernas.

The end of the road was a parking place on the pier for boats and of course motorhomes, though it is not registered as a parking place in any of our apps.

We ran into a couple of locals sitting in front of a taverna (had their worry beads doing a few laps) while we spoke with them.

They told us the tavernas only opened at 2pm so as we had seen the sign to the temple of Zanez about a km back, decided to explore this and soak up the hour or so until opening.

All the way uphill, we ventured over rocks and boulders along a track that thankfully was marked with red paint on the occasional boulder along the way to assist us with finding the temple.

Took quite a while and eventually we reached the top, only to find there was not much left of the temple - hardly worth the effort to get up there to see the ruins but the 360 degree view at the top was really worth it.

Got lost a couple of times on the way down and backtracked a couple of times until we found the red paint again.

Now really thirsty and hungry we headed back to the taverna where the locals had been sitting - only to be informed that Wednesday was a rest day and none of the restaurants would be open.

Had a Ziggy lunch and sat for some time and watched the fishermen try their luck from the dock.

Had seen this beautiful isolated beach only about 10kms back so decided to head back there and spend the night.

### **Our campsite for tonight: beachfront - co ordinates 36.728362. 23.026256**

Found a couple of Brits here soaking up the sunshine and after a long chat moved further up the beach to give them and ourselves some privacy.

They too were regulars to Greece and turns out they knew and were friends with Ben who we met at Monemvassia.

They are so lucky to be able to venture here every year from just across the channel - we are so envious and would love to be in their shoes.

Spent two wonderful sunny days here soaking up the sunshine and recharging the batteries (ours not Ziggy).

Even got out the BBQ and indulged in a wonderful rib fillet steak and a good bottle of Greek red wine for lunch (think it was Greek- can't remember!) then read my latest Dan Brown book, Inferno - but dozed off mostly in the camp chairs for a good part of the afternoon.

How wonderfully relaxing this country is!

### **Friday 2nd January**

A cloudy day for the first time in a few days so said goodbye to our Brit friends who are heading in the same direction as us over the next couple of weeks.

Likely we will probably run into them again.

Opted to head inland north over the mountains today instead of hugging the coast road.

Had heard that this was the wisest thing to do from here.

First stop after replenishing our food and grog supplies in Lidl in Skala was Sparta.

We headed to Mystras and spent the afternoon exploring the mid 13th century medieval fortress, citadel, churches and monasteries.

All of course built into a mountainside.

It constantly poses us with the question - how did they do it way back then when they didn't have the equipment and technology we have today.

For us, it is such a huge hike just to walk it to the top.

Unfortunately, at this time of year they close at 3pm so we did not get to see everything.

Really worth the time to spend here.

Decided to head for the coast again as there did not appear to be any interesting places to camp in Sparta though there is lots more to see here.

The main streets are lined with orange trees in full fruit.

Strange that they still sell oranges here when they are there for the picking in every street.

Have run out of the large bag we bought - fresh orange juice for breakfast for days - very tempted to stop and pick some but not sure if it is legal.

Travelled across country again over the mountains.

Great road with lots of scenery, though lots of hairpin bends and soon we sighted the water again.

### [Myli \(Mylio\) – Greece](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Beachfront, Myli (Mylio) - a few kms south west of Amyros - not designated campspot.**

Just a small village again with only one street leading to the beach where there is a boat ramp, great beach and of course lots of tavernas.

Parked right on the boardwalk and dropped in to one of the tavernas to check if we were allowed to park there.

With a big smile and "no problemo" reassuring us, we headed back to Ziggy and tapped into a free wi fi and spent a couple of hours catching up on the blog before choosing one of the tavernas to have another great Greek meal - just so inexpensive and oh so good.

Of course as soon as they find out we are from Australia they can't tell you quickly enough that they have a relation or friend who lives in Australia – usually Melbourne.

We then ask them if they knew that Melbourne is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest Greek City in the World – some do and some don't.

## **Saturday 3rd and Sunday 4th February 2018**

### **Nafplio – Greece**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Nafplio**

The first capital of Greece, Nafplio, gave us two wonderful days of walks and treasures to explore in this city.

This waterfront campsite gave us a front row seat view across to Bourtzi Island Fortress which was built in 1473 and became the residence of the executioners who carried out the death sentences in Palamidi prison.

It was converted to a hotel in 1935 with the only access being by boat.

The campsite is one of mixed parking where locals fill the car park over two periods each day.

Firstly for around three hours during lunchtime and then again around 7pm to -10pm for dinner - after that mostly only motorhomes and trucks stay during the night.

Saturday is market day so we found our way to the markets and watched locals buying up big on fresh fruit and vegetables as well as a variety of fish and shellfish from the open air stalls - some were not packed in ice!.

Australian OH&S Officers would have a field day here.

Stall after stall of assorted clothing and nick nacks were on offer and eager customers rummaging through them for a bargain.

Walked through the really interesting Old Town where the entire floor area of the town square was marble.

The terraced houses were just beautiful- fully restored and painted in pastel shades with balconies featuring coloured painted wrought iron railings and finishing off the picture with colourful potted plants.

There are so many magic walks that lead around the waterfront headland.

Our 3km walk took us along the steep cliffs of Acronafplia and past the walls of Palamidi Prison, through to Arvanitia Beach.

We spent some time speaking to a German motorhomer who gave us a wealth of information about the area and things to explore.

We had planned to spend our second night in the area at Karathona Beach but he told us the police were booking over nighters here at €150 a piece for camping there - he got booked two days before.

Left Sunday morning to go sightseeing.

First stop was Palamidi Fortress (from the Nafpoli side there were 1000 steps to get there) but by car and on the way to Karathona Beach, there is a turnoff which takes you to the front gate.

This Fortress is huge and even though we didn't do the 1000 steps to get here, I am sure we did about 250 steps around the site.

The views were panoramic across the town below and way out to the sea and mountains.

Worth every minute spent here and should be put on "your must do list".

From there we went to the famous Karathona Beach (for lunch only).

Very dead at this time of year with none of the tavernas open but in the summer time would be huge.

A beautiful beach but littered with garbage everywhere - very sad but pretty much the scenario all over many of the countries we have seen.

Saw the "no camping signs" and wondered why others chose to ignore it - cost them a pretty penny.

Came back to our campsite where a well deserved rest was needed before sampling some more great food at one of the waterfront tavernas.

### **Monday 5th February**

Our first stop was at the Ancient Archaeological theatre in Epidavros.

This theatre was erected at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC (not AD) – how old does that make it and how were these structures built with the limited equipment they had in those days.

It is estimated the theatre could accommodate 12,000 spectators.

Theatrical plays are still performed here during summer Epidavros festivals.

The theatre was excavated in 1881 and further restoration work was carried out between 1954-1963.

There are large parking areas at the site but overnight parking is not permitted.

### **Porto Heli (PortoCheli) – Greece**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Porto Heli (PortoCheli).**

Not in any of our apps but recommended by our German motorhome friend from Nafplio.

Travelled through some magnificent scenic mountain roads to the southern tip of this part of Greece.

Like so many places in Greece, the towns and villages are spelt differently on maps and APPS making it a nightmare to navigate using street addresses.

The village is set on a magnificent harbour front with expensive yachts and motor cruisers everywhere - many flying British flags.

Expect this is a place where wealthy Brits moor their boats and probably own some real estate here as well.

The harbourfront has free parking areas and there are no signs indicating otherwise.

Found the best spot of course and settled in for another peaceful quiet night.

### **Tuesday 6th February 2018**



## Galatas – Greece

### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking Galatas - opposite Island of Poros**

This parking area P3 is located right on the waterfront with views across to the island of Poros.

Galatas is definitely the poorer mainland sister of the two and is a little old village that sits in the shadow of its island sister of Poros.

Scattered tavernas and small supermarkets line the Galatas side but very few are occupied, with tourists opting to take the water taxi across to Poros for a mere €1 each way.

Poros looks so over populated with three storey terraced apartments and buildings occupying every spare inch on the waterfront and spreading up the entire mountain side - not a tree in sight - a little like Cinque Terrase but on a larger scale.

There is little or no waiting as the numerous water taxis continually come across between the islands and drop off passengers and then go to the back of the taxi queue to wait their turn again.

Some of the water taxis look like they can hardly make it to the other side but obviously this is a source of income to many here.

We, like other tourists ventured across to Poros and climbed the 200 steps to the Clock Tower which is the upper focal point of the island.

Views of course were spectacular from here and we could see Ziggy on the other side waiting patiently for our return.

Huge passenger and car ferries leave from here to tour the islands.

The other side of the island was similarly over populated and the walk was really enjoyable up and down the cobbled streets.

So many of the terraced apartments have been renovated and restored and are just stunning.

Down at the waterfront it was an eaters delight with so many restaurants to choose from and further along the boardwalk, a yachting fleet of 34 - 44 foot vessels stood ready to rent out in the summer months.

From here it would be amazing to rent one and tour the Greek Islands - sadly too cold right now.

I could see the faraway look in my drivers eyes - his dream no doubt.

### **Wednesday 7th February**

There are quite a lot of wild camping spots along this part of the coastline and the App "Park 4 Night" (French) - certainly gives us a lot more choices than the Dutch "NKC Parkings".

We firstly travelled to Methana which has two great spots - one on the massive jetty with water on both sides and the other on the Marina.

Both would have been fantastic but little or nothing was open in the town so decided to move on.

### Epidavros – Greece

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Palea Epidavros. GPS 37.6369N. 23.1618E**

Found this little gem on Park 4 night as well.

There are two spots here.

The first was a real challenge for Ziggy and my driver to navigate through this narrow streeted town to the beach.

Sometimes we were not able to get around the tight corners without doing a three or four point turn.

The beach was deserted but as we looked across the bay, we saw another better spot with a motorhome there already, so heart in hand went back the way we came.

Very tight again and at the end of it, we were delighted to make it without striking another car.

So peaceful and quiet here, with the only sounds being of the small waves lapping up on the beach of this headland.

The town itself is quite busy with tourists because of the archaeological theatre which is only a few klms away.

### **Thursday 8th February**

### Isthmia – Greece

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Isthmia, GPS 37.9134N 23.0078E**

Quite an isolated spot on the waterfront with a great beach.

Very little here apart from a few seaside homes and a beautiful taverna.

The views across to Corinth were entertaining watching the large ships coming and going in the distance.

A great place to catch up on chores, read and do some light laundry.

We sat and watched two young ladies riding two graceful and stunningly groomed stallions - one black and one white.

They trotted beautifully along the beach and then into the sea - sometimes the horses heads went below the water line and of course riders were very wet.

These were obviously very special show horses with this being part of their training.

We have been amazed at the number of stray cats and dogs here in Greece.

Our first memory was at our first night in Greece where this beautiful dog who had obviously just had pups, befriended us and followed us wherever we walked and sat outside just waiting for us to come out.

Of course, we fed her and patted her but did not realise that she was a stray as she had a collar on.

The day we left, she ran beside Ziggy until she could run no more and we were so sad and felt so bad, we have not fed any since.

We have been told by locals that this is normal and strays are left alone to survive or die.

Many local restaurants feed these strays and in return the dogs sit guard at the restaurant doors protecting the premises.

We have been told that it is wise to feed them as they will sit guard at your motorhome and alert you to any strangers who approach!

Haven't tried this as yet but don't think I could just leave them as we did with our first encounter.

Some of these dogs are just so beautiful - it really breaks your heart to see them like this.

Had dinner of course in the taverna (Greek salad was fantastic as always but seafood selected was deep fried and far from the best).

Stray dogs followed us back to Ziggy but soon gave up and went back to the restaurant to wait for more generous customers.

### **Friday 9th and Saturday 10th February**

#### **Ancient Corinth – Greece**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Camperstop, Ancient Corinth**

Spent two wonderful days in this campsite which is run by a wonderful old Greek couple.

They have created the campsite at the back of their home and provide everything you could want - water, power, shower and WC, grey and black waste disposal and Internet as well as a great undercover space to meet and mingle with other campers all for a mere €10 per night.

We certainly met some really interesting motorhomers here - Berndt and his wife are German but also speak Greek, French and excellent English and have been designated as Commandants of the campsite and interpreters for the old couple.

They have been living here for a couple of years now and have become Greek citizens.

They have no immediate plans to return to Germany as they disagree with what has been happening in Germany, politically, over the past few years (mainly the migration issues).

There was also an 85 year old Brit who is also in the process of obtaining Greek citizenship - very colourful character who is looking for a short term Bulgarian wife to assist his efforts to register and insure his motorhome in Bulgaria - then getting an instant divorce 😊 - all could be done from this campsite in Greece!

He evidently has lost his British motorhome insurance and can't leave the campsite until this happens – the Bulgarian marriage is the easiest way out???

The township is only a km from the campsite - but all uphill. Not much more than a couple of streets to the main part of town with scattered homes and small farms and of course the ancient ruins making up the rest.

**The Museum of Isthmia** here is one of the most interesting we have visited in Greece so far and the internal security was just amazing.

Every room we entered was manned by a person who followed us through every inch of the museum.

Evidently they had a very large theft some years ago (around 300 items) and through the FBI traced the thieves and lost artefacts back to the USA.

This museum houses the rich excavation finds from all periods including finds from Prehistoric settlements, Roman statues, mosaic floors and murals.

**The Temple of Apollo** and the ruins surrounding it, were really worth the visit - a very large area in total and including an amphitheatre.

Stopped in the Main Street for a drink and chat with the locals before venturing back down the hill to the campsite.

Lots of tavernas and eating places here as well as shops selling all replicas of Grecian pottery and statues.

Rained heavily through the night and continued on through the whole of next day so opted to stay on at the campsite until the weather cleared.

### **Sunday 11th February**

Said our goodbyes to the old Greek campsite owners who insisted we take some of their home grown vegetables - broccoli, potatoes and a massive butternut pumpkin.

They provide fresh fruit and veggies from their garden to everyone and stock the fridge in the communal area daily.

They also provide their own olive oil and wine for purchase.

Beautiful people and a really great campsite.

Headed off to **Nemea** around 30 kms away, only to find the Ancient Stadium and Ancient ruins including the **Temple of Zeus**, closed until further notice because they could no longer staff it.

We still managed to get a photo of the temple through the fence.

This area is also renowned for wine growing with a few wineries open to sample some of their wines.

Sampled a couple of good reds and a rose (not normally our preferred wine) - but this one was good.

From there we travelled to **Mycenae** one of the most ancient prehistoric Acropolis of the Peloponnese.

The Fortress here was built by the Mycenaean civilisation with the Lion Gates and the Cyclopean walls just breathtaking.

The museum here included a treasure of pottery, tools and jewellery of this era.

A quick trip then back to Ancient Corinth to the top of the mountain overlooking this city (park4nite GPS 37.8899N - 22.8682E).

Here the fortified Acropolis, **Acrocorinthe** is one of the largest and oldest fortresses in the Peloponnese.

Its imposing walls belong entirely to the medieval period.

Built before 1210 on the large plateau at the summit, stands the ruins of the temple of Aphrodite.

The view was absolutely breathtaking and it is possible to stay here for the night but as we had planned dinner in the town, (after all it was the Navigator's birthday) we came down from the mountain and found a park close to the tavernas.

**Our campsite for tonight: town Ancient Corinthe - (Park4nite - GPS 37.9076N - 22.8801E)**

Not more than a carpark, but only a few metres from the towns tavernas, this campsite allows for overnight parking for cars and motorhomes.

Found a taverna with a fireplace raging – (that was what we needed as the temperature had turned quite cold) - so ventured in and had just the best night.

Menus were in about 5 languages including English too (wake up to yourselves France) which helped because the owner didn't speak English.

Sat beside four old Greek men who were just enjoying each other's company (and the odd Ouzo) and soon we engaged in conversation with one of them who spoke English - he (Spiro) translated for the rest.

We laughed a lot and had a super meal and soon our friends left in the dark on step through scooters.

10 minutes later Spiro came back with a bag full of freshly picked oranges from his garden - how special was that - this is the hospitality we have treasured here in Greece and it made for a great birthday night.

### **Monday 12th February**

Decided to head back up the mountain to the summit this morning and have breakfast at Acrocorinthe.

Quite a few cars already up here by 8am when the gates opened so after a beautiful breakfast including freshly squeezed oranges (compliments of Spiro) we headed up the million steps to the top.

Really invigorating - started with coats, gloves and neck warmers and came back in short sleeves - did I say invigorating - meant exhausting!

Next we drove to see the submersible bridge at the **Corinth Shipping Canal**.

Only saw a couple of yachts go through whilst we were there - missed seeing one of the larger ships go through - so unbelievable though - what a buzz.

### **Monday 12th and Tuesday 13th February**

#### **Piraeus/Athens**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Parkopolis Port Parking, Piraeus/Athens**

Took the toll road as there didn't seem to be a lot of options from Corinth to Athens.

Went through two toll gates and thankfully only paid a total of €10.

The toll road was a breeze and we reached Athens quite quickly.

Travelled through the outskirts of Athens to get to the Port.

Back in the big smoke again and dreading every minute of driving through it.

The traffic fortunately was reasonably light though probably my driver would not agree with me as he was very quiet and concentrated very hard.

The campsite is nothing more than a car park with no amenities other than Internet, but only a couple of minutes walk to the train station and the Port itself.

Marie the parking attendant was super and gave us a map and a wealth of information to assist us with getting to Athens by rail and what to see whilst we were there.

Spent late afternoon walking around the Port area.

Had walked less than 100 metres and saw men urinating in the streets, homeless people sleeping in doorways and footpaths and men, women and children begging.

The whole area, and this is typical of much of southern Europe, particularly France, Portugal, Spain and Italy as well as Greece, is not much more than one big rubbish tip – individual residences and businesses don't get their own rubbish bin but a communal one for the street or the area and of course when there is no ownership to a bin then there is no responsibility and the whole system goes out the door and rubbish is just thrown anywhere and everywhere – even though some bins are marked recycling this just does not happen.

We felt very safe in our camp though with attendant supervision all day and gates are locked at 10pm at night.

We had a Brit motorhomer next door for the two days but didn't see them at all, they like us spent full days in Athens sightseeing.

Took off early next morning to the train station and following Marie's instructions, made life easy for us.

Piraeus is the end of the rail line and within seven stops we were in the heart of the Acropolis area.

The view from the train on the way to the Acropolis was just mile after mile of graffiti.

Bought a seven site pass at the Acropolis which normally costs €30 each but being over 65 and using my EU passport was reduced to €15 each.

We have found a few places that provide reduced rates for EU citizens over 65 years of age.

We visited The Acropolis and the Parthenon, Ancient Agora and the Temple of Hephaistos (and so many more Archeological sites and museums), the huge Athens Flea Market at Monastiraki and strolled up and down the Plaka area until we could walk no more.

So much has changed since our visit in 1978 with most of the statues now missing from the Acropolis and Temples - now housed in the museums.

Even out of season, it was extremely busy at all the tourist spots – very popular with Asian tour groups - would hate to battle the summer crowds.

The back streets away from the main tourist spots were an eyesore - beggars and derelict buildings everywhere.

Lots of Police on motorbikes, bikes and on foot.

This has been the norm here in most of the European big cities.

Athens is obviously feeling the results of the EU migration policy – in the Plaka area there were hundreds and hundreds of men aged between around 18-30 years old just standing around doing nothing in groups or around 4-12 – on a working day and in the middle of the day – they had a real eastern European look about them and it was quite worrying – they obviously were not gainfully employed.

We have procedures that we follow when walking in areas of high risk – we always walk in a direction facing the oncoming traffic, change sides of the street regularly, look in the glass of shop windows for reflections and when we feel someone is close behind us for some period of time we stop suddenly without warning and turn around.

I always carry my shoulder bag which contains our passports and all important paperwork with a chain which is locked to my wrist and the Driver regularly wiggles his shoulders to feel if anyone is trying to get into the backpack .

When walking down a narrow lane in the Plaka near the Flea Market we were followed by two dodgy looking guys and a female.

When we stopped unexpectedly and turned around the female was almost in the Drivers backpack and they pretended they were lost and moved to the side.

We resumed our walk and then the same thing happened again – just after that 2 Police came along on bikes gave them a real check out and the dodgy ones disappeared.

Very disappointing how Athens has changed.

Tasted the local "gyros" which is similar to our kebabs but wrapped in a whole Greek pita and served with a delicious sauce a bit like spicy hollandaise, tomato, lettuce and a few hot chips - so yummy! Two of these and two 500ml Fix (best Greek beer) for a mere €9.

Thoroughly, thoroughly enjoyed the day but by late afternoon when we could walk no more, headed to the train station.

There was standing room only and we were packed in like sardines but no one cared (except my feet of course).

Another very quiet night with just the two motorhomes in the car park overnight.

Highly recommended for location and ease of transport to Athens - though could not find anything interesting in the Port itself.

### **Wednesday 14th February**

Valentine's Day today so headed down to the tip of the island to the beautiful seaside village of Sounion.

We had such fond memories of this place in 1978 so thought after 40 years we would go back - expecting lots of changes of course.

Took the coast road and passed by so many Olympic Games sites - now looking very unoccupied.

Must have been such a financial burden on this relatively poor country.

### **Sounion – Greece**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Sounion GPS 37.6552N. - 24.0247E**

Surprisingly, very little had changed and even the little seaside restaurant (Fish Tavern Ilias) we so fondly remembered, was still there.

Some renovations of course but the main old part still there.

Celebrated lunch with my Valentine whilst overlooking the sea.

The grilled octopus was just delicious (but quite ugly looking).

One of those funny little memories we had of eating at this Taverna in 1978 was that when we arrived I ordered an Ouzo and Coke and my Driver, as usual, ordered a beer.

The Greeks could not imagine that Ouzo and Coke would be mixed so I was presented with about a 7 ounce glass of Ouzo and one of Coke.

This is one of the great memories we have recounted over and over again for the past 40 years.

The hotel next door where we stayed in 1978 was still there.

The only addition was another waterfront restaurant - all else unchanged.

Overlooking the small village, high on the hill, was the Temple of Poseidon.

Again the statues had been removed and now, like everywhere in Greece, barricaded and fenced off, with a pay station (in 1978 there was no fence and no pay station).

The entry costs to all archaeological sites are reduced in the winter months, but still very reasonable compared to other cities.



Rain clouds came over in the late afternoon but we were so happy that we had a beautiful day until then to visit the Temple and have a superb relaxed lunch in the sunshine.

There is a campsite area half way up the hill to the Temple but is very open and exposed so opted to spend the night at the other campsite down beside the Taverna.

Lots of stray cats here, but given a choice, they are better than the stray dogs who bark endlessly.

Rained all night but had another very peaceful quiet night with one other motorhome here to keep us company.

Food and drink is still comparatively good value in Greece compared to most other European countries, however not as cheap, comparatively, as it was 40 years ago – could have something to do with the fact that there is now 24% GST in Greece on everything you buy.

### **Thursday 15th February**

Still drizzling when we left Sounion.

Decided to have a few relaxing days on the beach with no mountain climbing, extra long walks or visits to archaeological sites planned - give the sore knees and feet time to recover.

We have found in Greece that the tolls are not based on the total distance travelled like Italy where you get a ticket on entry to a tollway and pay on exit.

Here you pay a standard fee from one toll station to the next where distances between each can vary substantially.

If you are unlucky enough to choose to get off after a couple of kms, then you pay the same fee.

Found it difficult to get NAVIE to stay away from the toll roads to our next destination but found a route that only required 2kms travelling along the tollway.

Took a chance and yes - 1.5kms along we hit a toll station and paid a hefty €8.20 to travel only another 0.5 kms - ugh!

### **Porto Rafti – Greece**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Porto Rafti GPS 37.8918N - 24.0246E**

Just what the doctor ordered, a quiet beachfront parking area with magic views (though still drizzling) with a couple of shops, a bakery and tavernas (none of which are open).

Beside the campsite is a fenced in beach volleyball court, which hasn't been used in a long time.

Lots of locals came here during the day to just sit and enjoy the views while others braved the cold and rain with some beach walking.

The town is only a couple of kms away, but we opted not to explore but sit and read and relax in the warmth of our Ziggy.

The never ending pretty line of lights across the bay during the night showed how populated the seaside villages were.

### **Friday 16th February**

Avoided the tollways today and travelled all the way along the coast line.

Roads were really good even though our Collins Map Book showed them as very minor roads.

### **Agioi Apostoloi – Greece**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Agioi Apostoloi, GPS 38.2944N - 23.8970E**

This is a really beautiful little seaside village with lots of tavernas and shops and a great little Marina.

The parking area is well done and well lit with lovely gardens and palm trees lining the boardwalk and the short walk to town.

Today is really cold and windy (just managing to get into double figures) with the sun only peeking out very occasionally.

The waves lapping up against the boardwalk today are very agitated and it amazes me to see the locals out swimming in this cold unfriendly washing machine like sea.

A really beautiful village and worth a night or two here.

### **Saturday 17th February**

Again travelling along the coast road, we passed over some beautiful coastal mountainsides with endless views across the sea to more of the islands on the Greek coast.

Sadly we have run out of fresh oranges which were so plentiful on the other coast.

Have been spoiled with freshly squeezed orange juice for breakfast each day and then more with the vodka in the evening.

Have not seen any roadside stalls for days now and the orange trees are few and far between here.

We have seen so many unfinished concrete two storey dwellings all over Greece.

Just the concrete frames and a concrete internal spiral staircase and nothing else.

These have been abandoned for a long time with no sign of ever being completed.

### **Drosia – Greece**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Drosia, 38.4828 - 23.5189**

A couple of kms from Drosia, this campsite again is absolute waterfront with a taverna and small fishing fleet in the Marina.

We took a walk along the beach and found very little sign of life.

Quite a few very large homes on large blocks of sea front land, all with high fences and imposing gates but very few looked occupied.

More also of the concrete unfinished structures.

The taverna was packed from lunchtime until dark and the aromas coming from there were mouth- watering.

We walked past several times but there was standing room only so left the locals in peace and retreated to Ziggy for some of last night's leftovers 😊

### **Sunday 18th February**

Sunshine for the first time in days but still a cool 11 degrees (inside Ziggy) when we woke up.

Looked outside at 6.30 am to see some locals right in front of us fishing - if it was 11 inside - wonder what it was outside?

Took toll road as couldn't find easy way to avoid this - cost €9.60 X 2 for approx 40km between toll gates.

### **Kaktis – Greece**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Kaktis - GPS 38.7083N 23.0630E**

Didn't take photos as my driver forgot his camera but the campsite was again a parking area adjacent to a Marina on the waterfront.

Very busy little village with lots of waterfront restaurants.

Weather has been overcast with very little sun and again cold.

Enjoyed a half hour sitting on the Marina watching the fishing boats come in and then took a long walk along the seafront.

### **Monday 19th February**

Lots of activity this morning as the car park became packed with locals and tables and chairs were being set around us - so thought it was time to move on. Lots of families with kids flying kites everywhere. Thought it must be a special day.

Couldn't find any way of avoiding the toll roads today.

Our first choice of campsite at Almiriou (39.2085. 22.8221) was very remote - beautiful waterfront views, 2 kms of beach and great places to park but no one was anywhere to be seen and it pretty much looked deserted. Decided to move on.

Volos was our next choice where there were three places to choose from.

This was an industrial city and soon we wished we had opted to head west and inland instead of this side.

What a nightmare for my driver and Ziggy.

Our first stop was in the heart of the city and looked very unsafe so onto our next stop to the other side of the town.

People and families and cars were everywhere and it didn't take long to guess today was a special holiday.

Double and triple parked cars made it impossible for Ziggy to get through so after a few nine point turns we headed out of town.

The last spot not far from here was on the beach but again but all the tavernas were packed and any chance of parking were impossible.

### [Kala Nera – Greece](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Kala Nera, GPS 39.4038N 21.6323E**

So happy to be away from here and as it was getting late headed for the next available camp spot.

This part of Greece is not our favourite as it is very industrial but here we finally came to rest at a great little waterfront spot with only a couple of spare spots.

It was raining slightly and our walk only confirmed that today was a holiday as the restaurants were packed and dads were flying kites on the beach with the kids.

#### **Saturday 24th, Sunday 25th February Monday 26th February**

### [Nea Moudania – Greece](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Nea Moudania – GPS 40.2378N. 23.2883E**

This is a great little town, very modern and not destroyed by graffiti.

It rained for the three days so opted to stay put until the weather cleared a little.

The campsite is a huge waterfront carpark at end of a Boardwalk with trendy tavernas and was very busy on Saturday and Sunday.

It surprises us how many Greeks eat out for lunch and dinner, even though the economy is supposed to be in tatters – most people seem to drive fairly modern cars as well.

Wherever we have been in Greece, the tavernas are pretty much full for around three hours in the middle of the day and then begin to fill up again around 7pm until 11pm.

Fishermen still braved the wet and cold conditions but we did not see anything being caught.

Quite a few shops in the surrounding streets and even found a Vodaphone store where we topped up our SIM card to cover us for the next couple of weeks in Greece.

Monday was horrible, bitterly cold with rain, sleet and even snow falling in the middle of the day - though it melted on reaching the ground.

Managed to find an internet network from one of the closer tavernas, where the password was proudly displayed on the site itself - nice one - took full advantage of this, though we had to park very close to it.

Spent the three days reading several books (have nearly read our complete library of Jeffrey Archer books) and occasionally going for quick walks in between rain showers.

## **Tuesday 27th and Wednesday 28th February**

Woke up to sunshine this morning - first time in a week - yeah!

Now we understand why the Brits and Europeans worship the sun on the odd occasion that it happens to pop out.

We too now can be found sun worshipping as it seems to be very rare here.

### **Poseidi – Greece**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Poseidi – GPS 39.9611N. 23.3709E**

What a difference a bit of sunshine makes - certainly lifted our spirits for the next couple of days.

We are now heading down another of the “three fingers” at the southern end of the eastern side of Greece.

This first finger is very pretty with lots of new buildings and apartments and very little or no graffiti.

We are right on a beautiful sandy beach with waves lapping only a few feet away and parked right next to a "funky bar" which we wanted to try.

Even though there were several cars at the front, turned out to be workmen getting the bar ready for opening in summer (both days of summer).

Not open until April, they said - we wanted to celebrate the sunshine so walked to the little village to check out eating options for tonight.

Sat in the sunshine like beached whales until 4pm and watched fishermen in boats casting and reeling in nets while hundreds of seagulls circled overhead hoping to pick up the scraps.

The wind came up and what had been a calm sea became choppy with white caps forming and then the fishing boats headed for cover.

Ziggy began bouncing around in the wind so we headed for the cover of town for the night.

Found a parking area in the middle where we were protected from the wind.

A big storm hit not long after with thunder, hail and sleet.

The sound on the roof was deafening - we certainly were glad we moved to town.

No dinner out tonight!.

Woke up to a beautiful sunny day next morning so headed straight back to the beach site where we spent the whole day just lapping up the sunshine, though it was still cold.

Walked into town again in the late afternoon and joined the locals for a drink or two.

Decided to bring Ziggy back to town for the night in case the weather turned foul overnight and parked in the same place as night before.

Back to the taverna (only one open out of 15 or so in town) and sat in front of a fireplace and shared a five course dinner and wine for less than €30.

Not many patrons tonight though there was one table with eleven Bulgarian guys and one female sharing a feast.

They rolled in to the village in 3 black Audi A8s – now we have seen plenty of Audi A4s at home and a few A6s but no A8s – they are big limousines – all the guys looked around 25-30 years old, had buzz cuts, wore black clothing and looked very, very fit and had very, very serious looks on their faces.

Their cars were parked outside the Taverna with BG number plates and another Bulgarian guy standing guard over the cars – strange as there were no other cars in the street, the village was deserted and apart from the Bulgarians and us there were only 2 other diners in the Taverna.

### **Thursday 1st March**

No sunshine this morning so hoped the overcast sky would not dampen the spirit after we had two glorious sun filled days.

Not a huge number of designated camp spots in these three fingers of eastern Greece to choose from in our APPS so spent some time looking and moving on where some places did not seem safe.

### **[Vourvourou – Greece](#)**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: near Vourvourou – GPS 40.1939N. 23.8061E**

Not a designated overnight camp site and on arrival saw a "no camping and no fires sign" hidden behind a tree.

Park 4 Night gave it a big wrap and claimed the locals had no problem with staying here in off season months.

Took a chance as this was a really beautiful tranquil waterfront site in a bushland setting with views across to Mt Athos.

We could only see the silhouette of the mountain because of the overcast conditions.

Spent a wonderful day and night here with no one anywhere - just the two of us and the birds (plus a stray German Shepherd).

### **Friday 2nd and Saturday 3rd March**

### **[Sarti – Greece](#)**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Near Sarti – GPS 40.0760N. 23.9841E**

It is becoming increasingly difficult to find something new to talk about as each camp we stay in in this beautiful country has similar characteristics e.g. Marina or absolute beachfront, waves lapping on the beach or boardwalk a few feet away, the place to ourselves, tavernas with the best food and the most wonderful carefree happy people.

This overnight spot is similar but more remote with no tavernas or town nearby.

Sarti is over the hill but a few kms away.

It rained the first day but when the sun came out on day two, it was not difficult to decide to stay for another night, in fact it was really difficult not to stay for many days as it was so great.

The view across the sea to the snow capped Mt Athos on the sunny day, was super.

We are truly relaxed now and really enjoying the Kindle books so graciously donated to us by our Scottish friends and are now quickly ploughing through the many Jeffery Archer, Michael Connelly etc novels we have.

Last count think I have read about 80 books since the beginning of our travels and my driver - more.

We do have Sat TV but apart from watching the occasional video, leisure time reading books is preferred.

The campsite on the beach is towered over on three sides by mountains with only a handful of homes visible and even these seem to be unoccupied.

Yesterday we watched a goat herder taking his flock down the mountainsides for grazing and today, they headed down to us on the beach.

The lead goats with cow bells on gave us advance warning and soon we had 100 + surrounding Ziggy.

So sorry to see them head away from the beach and over the next mountain.

A few hours later they returned on their way home.

Did not hear a sound on both nights except for the occasional wave crashing on the shore.

### **Sunday 4th March**

Reluctantly we left late in the afternoon in search of our next spot and after assisting a Greek family bogged on the beach in their very new Mercedes 2 door sports car, we ourselves struck issues with water-logged tracks, wash outs, subsided roads and walls of water cascading across causeways.

Several times we had to reverse back through narrow tracks when we could not go forward.

There has been so much rain in Greece over the last few weeks and with little or no drainage provided, streets and low lying areas flood quickly and roads have deteriorated.

With two of the places in our APPs not able to be reached because of water and road issues, we headed into some of the small seaside villages looking for a dry place to stop.

### **Porto Kaufo – Greece**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Porto Kaufo – GPS 39.970993N. 23.917494E**

A small road led downhill to this little village and at the bottom we found this magic spot along the boardwalk in a secluded bay with mountains all round and fishing boats at the little Marina.



Dropped into the taverna and asked if we could park here - no problems they said, so did not need any more encouragement to stay on.

Had another great meal in front of a fireplace and enjoyed the company of the waiter (who has a relation in Melbourne of course) who spoke excellent English and finished up in Ziggy with a bottle of wine and back to Jeffery Archer before having a peaceful night's sleep.

### **Monday 5th March**

The sun again disappeared today but overcast conditions did not stop a long needed walk.

So many beautiful bays to explore here.

Too much sitting and reading when the weather has been bad has not been good for the waistline and exercise has been virtually impossible.

Headed off after lunch and travelled through some picturesque countryside.

These three fingers of land in eastern Greece are not very wide and sea views greet us at every corner.

Small villages are in every bay and all along beautiful expansive beaches.

Got stymied again today when our choice of another beachfront campsite firstly offered a not too deep waterway to cross followed a km further on by an impassable waterway only a few metres before the campsite.

We sat there and pondered if we could get across but after having rescued someone bogged yesterday who didn't make it, sadly opted to move on - better safe than sorry.

### **Limani – Greece**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Limani GPS 40.395462N. 23.893749E**

We have now left the second finger and into the third.

Not many places to camp in this area as the bottom half of this finger is taboo for women to enter and men are only permitted entry to the many monasteries by appointment.

Greece is very much a man's world where everywhere you go, the men sit in tavernas eating and drinking and twirling their worry beads - very rarely do you see their women.

This campsite is not a designated camp spot in our APPs but has a huge carpark on the arms of the Marina and is just outside of town.

Lots of fishing boats here and fresh water taps to fill up the tanks.

It was quite wild and windy to sea but the harbour walls were tall enough to provide a safe harbour protection from the rain and wind.

A great view to the harbour and peaceful and quiet with only four stray dogs to keep us company.



## **Tuesday 6th & Wednesday 7th March**

Took advantage of the abundant water supply to do some much needed clothes washing (hard to do by hand but a necessity) and hoped for some sunshine today to assist with the drying.

Had rained constantly through the night but this morning looked promising for maybe some sun later.

The trip across the mountains again offering sea views at every corner was a real joy, particularly as we saw blue skies and sunshine in the distance.

### **Stavros – Greece**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Stavros**

Not a designated camping spot in our APPs however will give this a very high rating and had the most fabulous two days here.

This fishing village was the height of activity and our first stop for a few hours was right on the dock overlooking the fishing fleet.

There was a row of about 10 fishermen sitting on the boardwalk side by side.

They had telescopic rods fitted with multicoloured floats with a 6 inch trace and a hook which they rubbed something on before casting out.

They continued to throw burley out to where their hooks were and were bringing in heaps of fish during the afternoon.

I thought how envious both my fishing brothers would be to see this.

Ever so patient they sat there until dark.

We moved about 50 metres further down the boardwalk from the main dock for the night as we thought it might get too busy and noisy with fishermen coming and going during the night.

Good call as we were rewarded with a super quiet night.

We were woken up in the morning by fishermen coming in by boat with their evenings catch and soon after the cars began arriving with locals eager to buy fresh fish - so interesting to watch the locals barter and select their fish.

We strolled along the boardwalk and watched with interest as fishermen began clubbing their catch with what looked like very wide flat cricket bats.

Turned out to be octopus they were clubbing - we think to remove the ink and other bad bits.

This process took a long time and a huge amount of energy by the clubber.

Spoke to some of the fishermen and again they had relatives in Melbourne!

Ventured back to the main dock where the same fishermen were lined up in a row.

Took out the deck chairs and sat and watched them for ages.

Today the fish were not as plentiful but their patience was amazing and they sat for most of the day with just the occasional fish as a reward.

Not something this navigator or my driver would have the patience to do.

Were entertained by the local school band as they marched up and down the waterfront beating their drums and playing their trumpets and horns (very much out of tune) but looked like they were having a ton of fun - great to see.

Strolled up town mid afternoon but seemed like very little was open - must have been siesta time as later as it became dark, the tavernas came alive and people were walking everywhere enjoying a very balmy night - haven't had many of these lately.

Retreated to our overnight spot and enjoyed another great peaceful night.

### **Thursday 8th March**

Again were woken by the same fishermen coming in so decided to move along quickly so that the locals could park here right in front of the catch of the day.

Across the road trailers were being set up for their market day.

What a bonus for us to be right there within a few paces of the market.

Strolled up and down several times and picked up some really fresh fruit and veges - strawberries so fresh, red and sweet!

Next was the fish section where there were octopus, squid, calamari, whole fish and creatures we have never seen before.

Bought some calamari and then headed back to Ziggy to find a recipe.

### **Nea Iraklitsa – Greece**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Nea Iraklitsa 40.875636. 24.315567**

There are so many beautiful places to stop in this part of Greece and the co ordinates above take you to a long beach with so many places to choose from.

Only one small taverna (more like a cantina) here so very little traffic.

Stayed here all afternoon and then walked a small distance to the town.

Found a spot to park just on the outskirts of town.

In summer, there would be a cost to park here but the pay booth at the entrance was locked up and gates were locked open.

Went back to Ziggy and moved to town for the night where we spent an enjoyable evening strolling through town and the Marina.

### **Friday 9th March**

Looked at a couple of campsites in Kavala but this is a very big town and busy port area and none of the three we looked at seemed to be safe or quiet so moved on quickly.

## Keramoti – Greece

### **Our campsite for tonight: Keramoti - 40.8552. 24.6889**

This waterfront village is quite remote and is a small port where ferries and passenger boats commute to the Island of Thasos.

The campsite is just out of town (co ordinates above) and has a great beach setting but is remote with no housing around.

This would be a great place to camp but we decided to go back to town and park on the waterfront where there was more activity and things to see.

Massive ferries came and went and large and small fishing boats loaded and unloaded and the activity around the small harbour was never ending.

Walked to town but apart from the activity on the waterfront, a very sleepy little town.

Befriended a beautiful little stray dog who obviously had just had puppies.

Couldn't help but give her some food, though she was very wary of us.

My heart so goes out to these poor strays as many are so thin and sad looking.

Had our first feed of home cooked calamari with Greek Salad - not bad, for first attempt but eager to try again soon.

Had a reasonably quiet night though the fishing boats coming and going were a little noisy.

### **Saturday 10th & Sunday 11th March**

Our little stray returned next morning followed by her litter of 5 puppies - just so cute.

She stopped outside the door as if to show them off so again put some food and milk out for her which she gulped down and never let her puppies anywhere near it.

Guess she knew they would get the benefit later.

Interesting countryside - very flat now with low lying marshy waterways and lagoons on both sides of the road - bit like between Key Lago and Key West in the Florida Keys in USA.

Low bridges were created across the lagoons to houses and even a church on its own little island.

## Fanari – Greece

### **Our campsite for two nights: Fanari. 40.9627. 25.1261**

Another special place here where there are many waterfront spots that are available to park in.

Did a walk through town and stopped for a beer on the waterfront and then dropped into a seafood market where we found our favourite calamari again.

Purchased four large ones and watched as they cleaned it for me.

My attempt at cleaning them the day before was pretty much correct.

Parked in the beachfront carpark (co ordinates above) set up the table and chairs on the boardwalk and out came the BBQ.

Prepared two of the calamari, fully dried them with paper towels, laced them with some garlic oil, salt and pepper and then straight onto a very hot plate - four minutes each side said the recipe then garnish with parsley and lemon.

Sat in the sunshine with only short sleeves for the first time in a long time (though only for about an hour before the sun disappeared behind the clouds) and enjoyed the calamari and a great Sav Blanc.

Cars came and went and some beeped their horns and waved or gave us the thumbs up as they passed by.

Quiet night though this is a popular spot with people coming and going for walks along the beach.

Moved at nightfall when the lights did not come on to a spot about 100 metres closer to town where we experienced a peaceful night.

Woke up Sunday morning to a height of activity.

A bride walked past heading for the beachfront and cars and people came from every direction.

By 9.30am we were totally parked in and used this as an excuse to stay for another night.

Woke to a brilliant sunny day so we walked up town and found every available parking spot taken with the numerous restaurants fully booked out and people waiting for an available table - stayed like this all day and did not change until well into the night.

### **Monday 12th March**

Sadly our time in Greece is coming to an end - we both have fallen in love with this country and reluctantly make plans to head forward to Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia - countries we have never been to before.

There are several more great waterfront camps near Alexandroupoli which we explored but opted to head inland towards Bulgaria.

### **Loutros – Greece**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Near Loutros. 40.9627. 26.0516**

A "tree change" for today so headed north west into the mountains.

The spot we had planned (co ordinates above) took us through a small village of only a few houses and then down to an ungraded track which was a little rough.

It was getting late so opted not to go down today and parked in a great level spot in town where we had views across the valleys.

#### **(Co ordinates 40.9008. 26.0516)**

Woken up in the middle of the night by a massive storm, so glad we did not stay on the beach for this one.

## **Tuesday 13th March**

Our trip today took us up a highway which ran almost parallel to the Turkish border.

We encountered more police along the way than we have seen in the whole of Greece.

Mostly on the other side of the road pulling up cars coming from Turkey.

We are only a stones throw from the Bulgarian border so will expect to go through the border tomorrow morning.

Bulgaria is in the EU but is not a Shengen country so we expect to be stopped at the border for passport control.

## **Kastanies – Greece**

### **Our campsite for tonight: Kastanies. 40.651001. 26.472601**

Parked at a cafe opposite a Reserve which is just great.

The low bridge near the cafe across to the island is awash with a heavy flow of water across it so happily we stayed on this side for tonight.

There is a security gated area adjacent to where we are parked and the security guard doing the border controls looks at us regularly.

After having a coffee at the cafe, we took a short walk into town where there was not a lot happening so headed back as the storm clouds gathered overhead.

Another large storm hit us, this time with small hail stones but no damage done.

Rained throughout the afternoon which kept us indoors just watching the comings and goings in the cafe.

## **Bulgaria**

### **Wednesday 14th and Thursday 15th March**

Felt so sad this morning as we are leaving Greece today – neither of us wanted to leave but we still have so much to see in other countries.

We have had a really great time in Greece and would tour here again “in a heart beat”.

The only 2 criticisms we have of Greece is the number of stray cats and dogs roaming around everywhere and the amount of rubbish just left scattered all over the countryside and beaches.

After driving for just a few kms we approached the Greece/Bulgarian border where firstly we received a good behaviour stamp in our passports from Greece and then a few metres away we were at the Bulgarian border gates.

We were ushered into the truck lane but with only one oil tanker in front of us, we soon took our turn to check in and have passports stamped, provide vehicle registration and then a very quick visual internal inspection by one guard - quite easy with no questions asked.

They did not ask to see drivers licences, vehicle insurance, proof of ownership or any other details – a little different to what we had been lead to believe in travellers blog sites etc.

Purchased a vignette at the first service station which cost 15 Lev which is just over \$12 for a week for 3.5 ton and under.

Currency exchange rate of \$1AUD = 1.25 Lev.

Monthly vignettes are also available but opted for one week and will then top up if need be.

Bulgaria has a population of around 7.5 million with the capital city being Sofia.

One third of Bulgaria is covered with forests and 70% of the world's rose oil comes from roses grown in Bulgaria.

When Bulgaria joined the EU on Jan 1 2007, their Cyrillic language became the 3<sup>rd</sup> official language of the EU.

Not far from the border we came across several horse and carts travelling along the road which we have learned is quite common here.

Even the traffic signs include art work depicting them.

The countryside is just full of magnificent green pastures but trees are still leafless after winter.

Snow at the top of the mountains in the distance is still very visible and we have heard there is still lots of skiing to be done there.

This is a very poor part of Bulgaria near the border and we passed through quite a few shanty towns along the way.

Stopped at a couple of possible camp spots listed in Park4Night but there was no way we would have stayed there – this part of the country around Podkrepa and Haskovo looks like it is still in the Soviet era so we opted to head further to Plovdiv for our first night in Bulgaria.

Quite a long drive today think around 200kms where we experienced a mixture of road conditions.

One horrible long stretch of a highway - around 40kms was so rough, our teeth rattled, my driver grumbled and just about everything in Ziggy sang out STOP!!!!

On the way we passed many buildings which looked like they may have been factories of some sort in the Soviet era and they were just standing idle – but were an absolute eye-sore.

### [Plovdiv – Bulgaria](#)

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Plovdiv – GPS 42.146568N 24.720989E**

The trip through the town was quite uneventful and soon we arrived here.

This is a mixed carpark as part of a fruit market. It is free for the vendors and locals buying fruit and veges here during the day but for an overnight stay in a camper, the security guard charges 5 Lev per night.

There is a restroom and fresh water, the gates are locked at 9pm and reopened at 8am with a full security fence surrounding the property.

Took a short 10 minute stroll to Mall Plovdiv to an ATM to get some LEVs and then dropped into a small restaurant on the way back and enjoyed a super meal and two large beers for around \$13 AUD in total.

Just so peaceful and quiet here during the night.

Taxi fares are really inexpensive here and for a small 5 Lev we were in the heart of Old Town, Saborna Street.

The taxi ranks are everywhere along the main road so it was not difficult getting one.

Old town is set on a hill high above the town and was a real hoot which we thoroughly enjoyed.

The ancient fortress on the top of Nebet Hill offered a superb panoramic view of the town below.

The old town stretches through a huge area and it took most of the day to explore - so many great old buildings.

Next to the Kapana Creative District adjacent to Old Town is where we had a great late lunch.

The equivalent of the Greek chicken Giros from a shop called Hobo is priced at \$2.40 and is very similar but is massive and left us feeling fully stuffed.

A .5 litre beer here is around 2 - 2.50 Lev or around \$1.70.

The Kapana District is very modern with a full pedestrian street that runs for miles with shops and restaurants along the full length.

We walked the full length past Danov Hill and the clock tower and down to Tsar Simeon's Garden where we found several areas set aside in the gardens for men to play chess and cards in the open air.

Lots of mums and kids in strollers were out and about in the rare but welcomed sunny day.

Only disappointment was that the Lake Singing Fountains were not operational - maybe only operational in summer.

Think we will be eating out lots in Bulgaria as everything is so cheap.

Can't wait to see the prices in Lidl.

Really tired after the long day walking, so we chose one of the many restaurants to sit and people watch (and have another not so expensive drink) before catching a taxi back home.

Another quiet peaceful night.

### **Friday 16th March**

Though overcast to begin with, the scenery today was just so magnificent.

We travelled through the mountains today where the roads were etched out of the mountainside and the rock formations were so unique.

For most of the journey, train lines were on one side, cascading rivers on the other side with Ziggy in the middle.

Once in the valley the landscape changed to lush green fields and then to forests of towering pine trees.

Back up the next mountain, we were so high it began to snow and then rain and snow again.

Snow is still quite deep in parts along the roadsides and down the mountainsides into the villages.

The roads through the mountainside here are excellent.

### Belitsa – Bulgaria

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Belitsa – GPS 41.9491N 23.5591E**

This is our half-way point selected on the way to Rila Monastery which we hope we can get to tomorrow.

Travelled about 160 kms today with the road being very good most of the way.

Lots of roads in this country are like a patchwork quilt and we wonder how many more times they can be patched up.

Our campsite is in the middle of a little village, next to a sports ground and children's play area.

Nothing much to see here so a relaxing few hours to read and rest up before hiking tomorrow.

#### **Saturday 17th March**

The next 100 kms of reasonably good roads took us to the little town of **Stob and the Stob Pyramids**.

For a mere 1 Lev we got to walk up a steep mountainside for about 1.5kms to the top.

We followed a pack of sheep for the first half of the journey and they were making better time than we were!

The first part of the man made track was really slippery and muddy and then as it got steeper, was replaced by clay and rocks.

Haven't done a huge amount of walking or exercise over the last few weeks, so had a couple of short stops on the way.

The pyramids are just amazing - not to be confused with the Egyptian pyramids, these were created by Mother Nature and are huge rock formations shaped like pyramids which constantly change shape in differing weather conditions.

Today we were buffeted by strong winds and once at the top, it was extremely difficult and hazardous to walk along the headland track.



Just amazing seeing hundreds of these pyramids dominant in two sections of the gorge.

Really worth the walk, though preferably not during rain and high winds.

Continuing on and up through the Rila Mountains and National Park, the scenery was breathtaking with forests of huge pine trees and what would normally be a babbling brook following the road the whole way up, was now a roaring rapid.

### Rila Monastery – Bulgaria

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Rila Monastery – GPS 42.1325N 23.3396E**

Arrived at the monastery just after lunch to find that there was no parking left so moved past and up beside the monastery to the next carpark about 1.5 kms away.

This was a huge flat parking area which still had some snow and ice on it but was quickly melting.

Only one car and a small French motorhome here.

Stayed here for a few hours and then ventured back to the Monastery carpark and were happy to see very few cars left at 5pm.

Suggest anyone coming here should arrive before 10am or after 5pm particularly on a weekend.

Just a little light left now and as the opening times are advertised as 7am to 9pm, we took advantage of what was left of the day to see the monastery with a view to returning tomorrow for better photos.

Just magnificent - you pass through an archway adorned with paintings into a huge square.

The monastery is three floors high and fills all sides of the square with balconies looking over the beautiful church in the middle.

We spoke to the security guard located just inside the archway and asked if we could park outside for the night.

No problem and he suggested parking closer to the archway as there are security cameras there and is safer - three guards patrol the monastery during the night.

Outside the monastery, the cobble stoned walkways lead to restaurants and picnic areas where the babbling brook (now nearly raging Rapids) flows just outside the walls.

We were going to have leftovers but decided to eat out at the restaurant behind the monastery - should have had the leftovers – was probably the worst meal we have had!

Settled in for a more than peaceful night only to be woken up by heavy rain on the roof.

### **Sunday 18th March**

Sadly, fog was so thick when we woke that it was impossible to see a few metres in front of us.

Decided to wait a while for it to lift but soon after, heavy rain began to fall.

Three hours later, after checking the weather forecast, decided to move on.

We did not follow our golden rule of never leaving anything to see tomorrow that can't be seen today - because tomorrow is always a risk.

Not a huge number of campsites in our APPs for this area around Rila Mountains.

We didn't want to go through Sofia so opted to take a short cut through the middle from Dupnitsa to Samokov 40 kms on what looked like a main road.

Biggest mistake ever as this road is by far the worst road we have experienced in all of our travels.

Potholes that you could take a picnic in and bitumen patches that became like speed bumps - just horrible, horrible, horrible.

Avoid this road at all costs and go around through the outskirts of Sofia.

### Kokalyane - Bulgaria

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Kokalyane – GPS 42.587734N 23.420449E**

Not a good day travelling and we were so happy to find a place that looked promising to park for the night (GPS 42.5832N 23.4265E).

Wrong - this huge carpark was used for hoon driving practice during the late afternoon and not long after it became dark and we had finished dinner, we were harassed by three hot cars who used the carpark as a rally car circuit and came closer and closer at each turn - flashing lights and racing past within a few feet of us - time to move on so quickly got out of there.

Our fault as we were so tired, we broke one of our golden rules to never park in a big carpark unless it is in a reasonable sized town and only if there are lots of other cars or motorhomes there.

Only a km or so further down the road, we found the above parking area and settled down to a peaceful night.

There are quite a number of smaller spots to park not far away.

### **Monday 19<sup>th</sup> March**

Woke up to another miserable, foggy, cold and wet day and travelled mostly with the demister on.

Travelling along Highway Six was so much better today and soon we made short work of just over 100kms.

Not too many pot holes to fall into.

Scenery again of lush green valleys - such a shame the sun was not shining.

We have found the people here really friendly and helpful though very few speak any English.

Only a short 12 kms off the highway took us through the mountains to this wonderful village, though visibility was hampered by heavy fog and light rain.

### Koprivshitsa – Bulgaria

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Koprivshitsa – GPS 42.6426N 24.3598E**

The campsite is in the heart of the village and again we were the only ones there.

The attendant at the boom gate wandered over as soon as we parked and relieved us of around \$5 and then locked up her office and was not seen again for the rest of the day.

Hardly worth her while I expect - no other vehicles came in.

Spent a couple of hours waiting for the rain to stop and given our experience yesterday at the monastery decided to venture out and try to take some photos – fog or not.

It was freezing outside so put on all the gear including hats and gloves and braved the elements.

First task was to find the tourist office which wasn't easy as everything here is in written in Bulgarian.

Their alphabet is even more difficult than the Greek alphabet but it was a joy walking through this UNESCO heritage listed town and eventually after asking a few people (using google translate) we found the tourist office.

Armed with a brochure, a map and tickets to go through 6 of the museum homes here – three only open today and the other three tomorrow, we set off in search of the first one.

Quite a challenge as the English brochure we had did not have the Bulgarian translations so the names on the museums were totally different to what was on our brochure.

Such a wonderfully interesting afternoon walking through the cobble stoned streets and going through the museums.

The fog lifted a little so did manage to take some photos but hope tomorrow will reward us with some finer weather.

It was bitterly cold outside so ventured back to Ziggy for a couple of warming vodkas.

Light rain turned to sleet and then to snow for a short while and the temperature inside dropped considerably.

Turned on the gas heater which remained on all night.

### **Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> March**

Woke up to a winter wonderland with snow quite a few inches deep.

Must have snowed through most of the night.

Just so beautiful outside and light snow still falling.

Back into the snow gear and went in search of the three remaining museums.

So much prettier than yesterday with everything covered in snow.

They have nine months of winter annually here in this valley.

Captured this winter wonderland with lots of photos.

There is just something so special seeing trees with their branches under the weight of snow and valleys and mountains blanketed in white.

Once down in the valleys, the snow was melting quickly and turned to slush with still lots of pockets of snow here there and everywhere.

### Kazanlak – Bulgaria

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Kazanlak – GPS 42.6261N 25.3976E**

On our way towards Kazanlak it had stopped snowing and even had a couple of patches of blue sky though no sun.

We saw the sign to the Valley of the Thracian Kings so took a detour.

There are several tombs in the area and most are signposted.

In this valley the town of Shipka has one of the most amazing monasteries consisting of two very different pieces of architecture joined together.

The Monastery of Hram-Pametnik, has several gold domes which can be seen from miles away.

There is no cost to see the monastery, however they do ask for a small donation if you want to take photos.

Such a great building and would strongly suggest a visit if in the area.

Only a few kms to the town of Kazanlak and our campsite for tonight is just at the bottom of a hill with about fifty steps to the Tomb of Kazanlak the Thracian King.

The original tomb is closed unless you are part of a group and have prearranged a tour, however they have built an exact replica a short distance away which you can inspect for a couple of LEV - really interesting.

The campsite is a carpark which can take about 10 motorhomes and the same number of cars.

Set out in search of a taverna but could not find one close by that was open.

The carpark is quite busy until around 10pm but very quiet after that.

This town is also famous for its rose gardens and rose museum.

June is the rose festival month so is the best time to be here.

### **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> March**

Were woken up by three lady workers who set about sweeping the carpark and picking up any rubbish.

We watched as they created hand-made brooms with the branches of fir trees by attaching these with rope to long wooden sticks – suspect this is how their forefathers made brooms.

We have found the women doing similar jobs in all the villages and towns which are clean and free of rubbish and with very few stray dogs.

Such a shame Greece does not do this as it is so full of rubbish and no one seems to care.

It was our intention to spend a couple of days in Veliko Tarnovo.

Such an interesting city to drive through with the Citadel towering over this huge city.

We drove through the Old Town and saw amazing cathedrals which were unbelievable and then spent the next three hours trying to find a place to stay.

Our ideal spot was totally torn apart with earthmoving equipment taking up most of the carpark.

Think it was being renovated with new lighting towers in place and the rest being levelled to be ready for tourists in the summer months.

We stopped for lunch here but were given the royal stare by the workers so moved on.

Three other car parks were not suitable for motorhomes or were full.

Frustrated to say the least we moved toward a farm stay a few kms out of town.

This took us off the main road and up a single lane track for about 1.5kms.

On arrival we found a car and trailer bogged at the entry with no way around it.

The owner (a Brit) came out and told us it would take about an hour to tow the car out so we had no option but to reverse back the 1.5 kms over a snowy and muddy narrow winding track to the main road.

My amazing driver made it look so easy.

He said he had never had to reverse as far before, even in good conditions.

There are very few camping spots in all of Bulgaria, particularly in the north.

### [Polski Trambesh – Bulgaria](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Polski Trambesh – opposite police station.**

It was now very late in the afternoon with nothing promising on the horizon.

Drove through a few towns but could not find any place off this busy highway that was not muddy and slushy.

This is a small to medium sized town and off the highway so decided to stay here.

Found a wide level street in town and settled down and people watched for some time.

We certainly created a lot of local interest and we feel not too many motorhomes have passed through here.

Felt very safe being opposite the police station and had a very quiet night after around 11pm.

Temperature had dropped by 12 degrees by bedtime so expected a cold overnight temp.

### **Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> March**

Again woke up to a winter wonderland with snow several inches thick outside.

Overnight temperature was -1 with a maximum of 0 expected during the day.

It was snowing again with heavy flurries.

Not long after we left town, conditions worsened and soon we were in blizzard conditions.

The windscreen and wipers started to ice up and even using the demister was not keeping up with the outside conditions.

We were happy to get off the highway and took a side road to see the Ivanovo rock churches.

Passed a 4WD car bogged in snow on the side of the road with no one inside.

The roads were icing up so we hoped we would not end up like the bogged car did.

Visibility was poor when we arrived at the churches so took a couple of photos and headed back to Ivanovo before we got stuck too.

Filled up with fuel and gas and the attendant told us our next stop was ideal to spend the night.

### **Basarbovo Rock Monastery – Bulgaria**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Basarbovo Rock Monastery - 43.7659 25.9658**

Only around 10kms from the rock churches, this place is just another one of those “must see” spots.

The monastery is literally carved into this incredibly unusual and spectacular mountain and rock formation.

In front of this is a new and more modern monastery and church which is occupied by two monks.

The snow was falling quite heavily when we arrived in the carpark but took the time to enter the monastery gates and take photos of this amazing place.

Didn't venture up the rock face today as weather conditions were woeful but remain optimistic about tomorrow.

Sat in Ziggy and watched the heavy snow flurries fill up the surrounding trees, monastery buildings and carpark – just so wonderful and serene.

### **Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> March**

It must have snowed all night as outside was a sea of white, white and more white and snow was still falling heavily.

Snow was so thick in the carpark that the entrance was nowhere to be seen.

Snow on Ziggy's roof was at least 6 inches thick and totally blocked out the solar panels.

We enjoyed the scenery whilst hoping that a snow plough would come along and clear the way for us.

The trip down the mountain and to the town of Ruse was really scary as the snow had turned to ice and visibility was poor.

### **Ruse – Bulgaria**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Lidl, Ruse**

Lidl came into view and we drove into the carpark and turned off the engine with a sigh of relief.

With snow piled high on all sides of the road on all roads, there was no where else to park that wasn't snowed in.

Regardless of what happened now, we had our food chain at the doorstep and hoped no one would ask us to leave.

Lidl closed at around 9pm and didn't hear a sound until 7.30am next morning.

### **Romania**

#### **Saturday 24th March. - Romania**

Romania has a population of around 22 million people, with a land area of 237,500 sq. klm and the capital is Bucharest.

Romania is a member of the European Union but is not in the Schengen Zone.

Romanian is the official language and the Romanian Leu (plural – Lei) is the currency.

Australians do not need a Visa to travel in Romania and can stay for up to 90 days.

Wild camping is allowed with permission from the land owner/manager or local government.

Leaving the safety of Lidl in Bulgaria we only had around 10kms to travel to the Romanian border but still the roads were heavy with snow, mud and slush.

Through the Bulgarian customs we went only to be recognised by the customs official who said "We saw your lovely motorhome parked in Lidl last night".

We thought that was very funny and received the passport stamp and tick of approval after paying the €2 toll to use the bridge across the Danube to Romania.

Next on to the Romanian customs counter where we again got a Royal Romanian stamp and a fleeting look into Ziggy from 2 customs officials.

They didn't even come inside but merely glanced through the habitation door and spent the next few minutes talking to us about Australia.

Another easy border for us to cross.

Bought a vignette for around \$8 AUD for seven days a few meters on and then began the most horrific 300 metres we have ever experienced in our life.

Just about 200 metres from the border gates, we noticed the traffic was not moving in any direction and saw trucks lined up for as far as you could see heading our way towards the border gates.

We suspected there may be an accident and within minutes saw a car blocking one and a half lanes, in a pot hole, with underneath bits hanging off everywhere.

It had hit a massive pot hole in the road and didn't make it up the other side.

We were lucky enough to be able to get around it but found another 20 or more potholes of a similar size where we had to change to first gear to get up and out before moving on to the next one - this is no exaggeration!!!

Hate to think how bad it would be a few hours later with the number of trucks increasing the size of the potholes through every crossing.

Pot holes are impossible to see when covered with snow and or melting slush which turns to water and then it is difficult to determine the size and depth.

Do hope they spend some of the money they get from the Vignettes to fix up the roads and soon.

The roads are horrid in general except for some of the newer highways and we did hit one pothole at quite a speed and were so relieved no damage was done.

We did so enjoy driving up through the centre via the scenic route which was breathtaking to say the least, but each time we arrived at a potential camp for the night, most were snowed in or not open.

There is something so serene and special about driving through snow covered mountains where trees are dripping with snow and streams part covered in snow gently meander down the mountainside.

Frustration again set in (as well as an exhausted and tired driver) and when we were within a few kms of our final choice Brasov and were stopped by the police to let us know the road was closed, it was the final straw.

We had seen a Lidl a few kms back so thought that was our best option.



## Busteni – Romania

### Our campsite for tonight: Lidl - Busteni

Nestled into a corner of the carpark, we hoped no one would notice us and slept peacefully until 8am next morning.

### Sunday 25th March

No new snow overnight and we were pleased to see some of the ice in the car park was beginning to melt - the sun had actually come out for the first time in days.

Headed back toward Brasov and hoped the road was open today.

It was and this time we were rewarded with breathtaking scenery all the way through the mountains.

This is a very popular part of Romania with ski fields in many of the towns along the way.

The roads were also very busy as skiers enjoyed the huge snow dump and took advantage of it to get in some last season skiing.

## Brasov – Romania

### Our campsite for tonight: Brasov, (Aleea Tiberiou Brediceanu). GPS 45.6407N 25.5950E

Brasov is very special but there are few places that a car can park in, let alone a Ziggy Bus.

The centre is full of apartment blocks with only street parking available for owners with stickers.

This car park is quite difficult to find as our NAVIE kept taking us round and round the block.

Finally we used the above address and soon found the spot right next to the Old Town Wall.

Being a Sunday, there was not a spare spot anywhere with buses and cars double parked.

We found a spot just out of town by a sports field and did some chores until later in the afternoon and then ventured back at 6pm and luckily found one or two spots available.

Took a long walk into the Old Town where we were able to get some photos before dark.

### Monday 26th March

Back to explore more of Old Town this morning.

So many beautifully restored old buildings, street after street after street with the Main Street, cobble stoned and a pedestrian way only.

The town square is the most spectacular with the Black Cathedral being one of its feature buildings, however sadly closed on Mondays so did not get past the front gate.

Bought a Romanian delicacy called Kurtos from a street stall.

Tastes a bit like a donut but is long and hollow with the outside tasting like toffee.

It is pastry rolled onto a cylinder and then cooked as it turns past a heated element - yum!.

Romanians love their pastries and nearly every person we saw was eating some kind of pastry.

Also noticed a lot of dentists around - too much sugar eaten I think!

The snow is now melting fast - thank goodness and as we travel through the countryside - the white hills are turning into brown hills with only patches of snow to be seen on the hills.

### Sighisoara – Romania

#### **Our campsite tonight: Sighisoara (8 Strada Anton Pann) 46.2188N 24.7882E**

This campsite is on a road at the bottom of the citadel where there is room for cars and coaches.

Parking costs less than \$2 AUD per day from 8am to 5pm and free after that.

The parking attendant is very busy and strictly monitors every vehicle that stops.

What a trek up the hill - over 100 steps to get to the entrance at the top and then another 200 or more going up the different levels to the church at the top.

Certainly worked off the Kurtos by day's end.

The clock tower in the square is one of the main attractions and appears to have figurines that move through openings under the clock - probably at midday we think.

We are in the heart of Transylvania (home of Dracula).

We even passed by a house which proudly declared that "Dracula was born here".

Every citadel in Romania we have visited has been packed with school kids of all ages and each has been so interesting.

Seems like nearly every medium plus sized town has its own citadel.

We took another way down into the new part of town which would have been far easier than the first 100 steps and stopped in a bar for a well deserved beverage.

### **Tuesday 27th March**

Left before 8am but not until the attendant asked to see our receipt.

He arrived at 7am!! If you stay longer, then another day's payment is required.

At less than \$2 a day - that would not be a problem at all.

Travelled to Sibiu where we parked right in town at the beginning of the walk to Old Town (co ordinates 45.7920N 24.1488E).

This car park is very busy and though it has a number of large spaces for motorhomes, this does not stop the locals from parking there in their cars.

We were warned about getting there early hence the early departure.

The cost here is 1 Lei per hour which is \$0.33 per hour.

You can stay as long as you like including night time but opted not too as we thought it may be too noisy with cars coming and going all night, though looked very safe - a great spot to visit this town.

Most of The Old town is a pedestrian only zone and stretches over many streets of beautiful churches, clock towers and beautifully restored old buildings.

It has two large squares in the centre with many more smaller ones on the outskirts.

Spent several hours there finishing in a restaurant for lunch.

Sat by the window people watching as the restaurant quickly began to fill up.

Almost got invaded by a school group of 20 or so children around 10 years old - thankfully there was not enough room left so they moved on - phew!

Decided not to stay here for the night and moved on.

### [Alba Iulia – Romania](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Alba Iulia - 46.0645N. 23.5748E**

Arrived here just before nightfall and began working on our blog when we were surprised to see another motorhome pull in.

Think we have only seen a total of 2 motorhomes in the last few weeks.

Recognised the motorhome and its occupants from a place we stayed at in Greece (Thessaloniki) so spent the rest of the night talking with Arthur and Anais, a young couple from France about their travels since last seeing them and exchanged great spots to visit.

It was certainly great to get some feedback on places to stay in France when we return there later in the year.

### **Wednesday 28th March**

Spent the morning catching up and up loading photos before venturing up the hill to the Citadel.

What an amazing place and we found it only by accident.

There is no reference to it in any of the research we have done.

The city within the walls is so well laid out and not of the same vintage as some of the others we have experienced but just as intriguing.

Hundreds and hundreds of school kids were everywhere - obviously school excursions just before Easter - really worth an overnight visit.

There are two spots to camp around the Citadel, we chose the quietest one.

The rain began to fall quite heavily so we quickly headed back to Ziggy and left not long after for Turda.

### Turda – Romania

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Turda - Aleea Durgaului - GPS 46.5878N 23.7924E**

Arrived here just before 5pm and did a quick drive past.

There is a carpark right at the entrance that offers day parking for under \$2.00 for cars only and another carpark a little further on for buses, motorhomes etc at an hourly rate of 1 Lei (33 cents).

We parked in the recommended motorhome parking which is around 200 meters from the front entrance and overlooks beautiful green pastures.

The salt mines of Turda (Salina Turda) open at 9 am in the morning and we are looking forward to seeing these and comparing these to the Wieliczka salt mines in Poland and the ones just outside Salzburg in Austria, both of which were outstanding.

Super quiet place to stop with again no other motorhomes around.

#### **Thursday 29th & Friday 30th March**

We were one of the first to arrive at the salt mine shortly after 9am.

Received the old age entry fee (over 65's) of around \$5.00 each and quickly descended the steps down, down and deep into the shaft.

Wasn't looking forward to coming back up again later as these old knees are barely hanging in there and want to make sure they last until we come home.

This salt mine is very different to Wieliczka in Poland and Salzburg in Austria and in our opinion no where as good.

However, the mine is very interesting and would be more so for the younger set as at the bottom of one of the oldest mine shafts, they have fitted out this massive area as a "play area" with two ten pin bowling alleys, numerous table tennis tables, mini golf, snooker tables, a Ferris wheel, and an area where you can hire a row boat and paddle about for 20 minutes.

This area has been very well done and soon we were ambushed by coach loads of kids who quickly took over.

We arrived in an echo chamber and after listening to a school load of little ones screaming at the top of their voices, we headed back to the safety of the top floor and then out to the carpark which was now filled with coaches.

Left by 11am and headed north through some very poor and industrial areas of Romania. It is hard to believe people can live in some of these places that barely have a proper roof to protect them in the freezing temperatures.

Stopped to have lunch beside a roadside restaurant and were soon approached by a beggar with a child - so heartbreaking that they need to resort to begging.

## Firiza - Romania

### **Our campsite for two nights: Capiora, Firiza- GPS 47.740120N 23.602400E**

Not far from the large town of Baia Mare is a turnoff to this place. The roads were not great but the scenery up and through the mountain was fabulous.

The small town of Firiza consists of only around 50 houses, three of which are bars (nothing like back home - they are in private houses), no shops and this great place is where we stayed for two days.

A really beautiful bushland setting with a fabulous restaurant and accommodation.

Only room for a few motorhomes and with a cost of only \$8 per night including electricity and good internet, it really was worthwhile staying on and chilling out here.

The food was just amazing (particularly the goulash) and with two courses and two large beers costing \$24 for both of us - a real bargain.

Had to have dinner there two nights in a row as the food was so good.

Nothing was too much trouble and the owner Gabriele, speaks excellent English.

She gave us a huge amount of information on places worth visiting in Northern Romania.

### **Saturday 31st March**

Filled up with fresh spring water, said our goodbyes and headed off around 11am.

First stop was Sapanta which is close to the Ukranian border.

The "Merry Cemetery" is very unique and is one of the attractions that has put this small town on the map.

Its brightly coloured church spire and roof tiles together with colourful tomb stones attract tourists by the busload.

Just outside of town is the Peri Monastery which boasts to be the worlds highest wooden building.

The woodwork is just amazing.

We were unable to get inside the church but were able to climb up the steps into the tower to get a birds eye view of the property.

The steps leading to the tower were carved out of one tree trunk.

We had planned on staying in the carpark here which looks safe and quiet but it was still early so moved on.

We travelled on through many towns that had wooden churches and monasteries - a distinct feature of this part of the world.

Some of the wood panelling at the entrances and doors to these and also to many houses, were incredible masterpieces.

Found a spot to park just outside Sighetu Marmatiei at a museum but the ground was so soggy and wet, could not park there without fear of being bogged so moved on again.

### Viseu de Sus – Romania

**Our campsite for tonight: Wassertalbahn, Viseu de Sus - GPS 47.714611N 24.442820E**

Hadn't planned on such a long day, but ended up being a very interesting day with so much to see.

Wassertalbahn built in 1930, is about a km outside of the town and hosts a train museum as well as being a working station.

We arrived here at 6pm and as the office was closed, the security guard told us to park and see the office in the morning.

The gates were closed at 8pm and the site is monitored by cameras and an onsite security guard during the night.

Only the stray dogs and us were the parks occupants for the night.

### **Sunday 1st April - Easter Sunday**

Rained heavily through the night and the carpark was awash though did not stop the coaches and cars filing into the carpark and boarding the steam train which leaves at 9am and returns at 3pm.

It is a very popular tourist attraction and the train was full, even off season.

Played dodgem potholes again today, think we are becoming used to the roads a little more now - though my driver might not agree!

Travelled on to Bitoza a small town that boasts being the prettiest town in Romania.

The town runs along a waterway with some parts on the other side accessible only by small bridges.

Our recommended campsite happened to be on the other side and with the road awash and muddy, did not want to tempt fate by trying to cross.

Today is Easter Sunday and in Europe, traditionally a day that is highly celebrated beginning with a long visit to your local church until about midday followed by eating, drinking and being with family for the rest of the day.

When we arrived in Botiza the cathedral services had just finished and we watched as the congregation left in droves and walked home down the middle of the street (umbrellas up and trying to avoid the mud and slush on the side of the roads).

Most of the women were dressed in traditional Romanian costume and waved when they saw us taking photos.

Such a shame that the rain has dampened the traditional spirit of this day.

The original Orthodox Church on this site was built in 1694 and is now overshadowed by the new spectacular cathedral which was completed in 1974.

Only a few kms away we stopped at the famous Orthodox Barsana Monastery which is a famous pilgrimage spot even though it was built in the 1990's.

There are at least a dozen buildings in this complex set on acreage with a backdrop of beautiful mountains and valleys.

From here we tried to find a campsite (though there are none listed in any of our apps).

Travelled through town, and like most of these towns, it has only a one street frontage with little or no places to stop.

### **Barsana to Stramtura – Romania**

**Our campsite for tonight: Halfway between Barsana and Stramtura - GPS 47.795880N 24.082424E**

A dead end bitumen road off the main highway that is wide and flat.

A restaurant is on the corner and down the street, what looks like council vehicles are behind a locked gate.

There are rolling hills and green pastures across the road.

The restaurant was quite busy most of the afternoon but there is so much space here and is well lit.

### **Monday 2nd April**

Today is meant to be a public holiday here, however the council workers were arriving by 7am to start their day.

Woke us up when the cars arrived but soon we were back in the land of nod for another hour.

Took out the pinking shears and trimmed my drivers woolly mane.

Quite a reasonable job and navigated well around the edges.

Certainly has been worthwhile buying the hair trimmers in Oz before we left over a year ago.

Travelled up and over the mountains again today and soon we were travelling through a winter wonderland with light snow falling.

The roads over the mountain were excellent, just as well as there were tons of hairpin bends to navigate both up and down towards Baia Mare.

It is so hard to describe our joy as we pass through village after village, each with their own individual and special characteristics.

The little old ladies walking the streets all look similar - about 5ft nothing tall and almost the same around the middle, skirts down to their ankles, bright coloured aprons and scarves and boots.

We take so much for granted in Oz and it certainly brings home how lucky we are.

These people have virtually nothing and live in houses that would barely withstand a strong wind.

They go out during the day in horse and cart and bring home timber for the evenings fire.

Some places here are so old world charm still - they smile and wave as you go by.

### Carei – Romania

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Carei**

This is a beautiful and well laid out town but with no designated camping spots in any of our APPs.

Our first challenge was to find somewhere to camp.

There are lots of parking places and finally we chose one directly opposite a grand castle and magnificent church.

Weather has been woeful over Easter but as we arrived here, the sun came out so took advantage and strolled through town.

Spent a couple of hours walking around and stopped at a bar to people watch for a while before heading back.

It is 7.30pm now and the sun is still out - hope Mother Nature allows us some more tomorrow.

### **Tuesday 3rd April**

Wow - a cloudless warm sunny day!

Haven't had many of these and hopefully will dry up some of the slush we have had to drive and wade through over the last couple of weeks.

Such a shame, as to experience these quaint villages and majestic wooden churches and cathedrals would be 1000% better in sunny conditions.

We are heading now towards the Hungarian border and have a few Romanian Lei left over so decided to spend one more night in Romania.

### Oradea – Romania

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Oradea - GPS 47.055012N 21.938210E**

A beautiful well laid out town with the parking right beside the river and only a couple of blocks from the central town mall area.

The advertised rate in our APPS are incorrect.

The cost is 2.6 Lei per hour (under \$1.00) from 7am to 6pm and free after that.

Once we had worked out the ticket machine, we paid the cost to 6pm and then headed down to the mall.

Such a surprise - so many wonderful buildings in a huge square, where local vendors were displaying their wares in timber stalls.

Across the bridge and over to the other side, we found another walking mall that stretched for a km or so where locals and visitors were enjoying the sunshine in outside eating areas.



Many of the old buildings are being restored and will probably be open for the summer months.

Returned back to the main square where we enjoyed one of the Romanian delicacies - Sarmale (spiced meat wrapped in cabbage leaves) - great but not as good as mums cabbage rolls).

## Hungary

### **Wednesday 4th April 2018**

Woke up before 7am to another wonderful sunny day and left our park shortly afterwards - two sunny days in a row - wonderful!

3.5kms out from the border gates, we saw a continuous line of trucks heading for the border – they were at a stand still.

Fortunately, there were two lanes so took the other one which hopefully was for cars and soon were at the border gates.

Handed in our Australian passports, our MOT and registration papers followed by a cursory inspection inside and then waited - and waited - and waited.

Seemed like an eternity before a customs official asked us to move over into the parking area beside the office and wait.

Romania where we had just left is a non Schengen country and we were trying to enter Hungary which is a Schengen country and we wondered if for the first time, we would be stopped for breaking the Schengen rules.

Funny how you become worried when you are made to wait.

About 10 minutes later, the official came out, handed us back our documents and wished us a happy time in Hungary.

We are still no wiser as to why we were kept waiting.

Hungary has a population of around 10 million and a land mass of 93,024 Km<sup>2</sup>.

The official language is Hungarian but as Hungary shares its borders with Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Austria and Croatia many people speak several languages.

The currency is the Forint (HUF) and there are currently approximately 195 Huf to the Australian dollar – quite a shock when filling up with fuel or grocery shopping and looking at the bill with lots of zeros on the end.

After travelling a while, it was obvious our dodgem potholes days were over (for the time being) as the roads, still patchy, were at least pothole free and we could travel at a good speed.

Didn't strike a mountain all day and mostly went through flat agricultural country.

Towns we passed through were very modern compared to Bulgaria and Romania and were not as affected by the snow and rain we had been experiencing.

Arrived in Szeged only to find no spots available in the Park4night spot as the locals had taken every spot available - so had to reluctantly move.

## **Szikos – Hungary**

### **Our campsite for tonight: Szikos – GPS 46.2718N 20.0225E**

About 15kms away, this designated Camping area only opens on 1st May and even though the boom gates were open, staff would not allow us to stay there.

They were getting the site ready for opening in three weeks time.

We parked outside the gates in a beautiful forest area and were really happy we were not allowed in, as it was just so magic here.

## **Thursday 5th April**

Still very flat and agricultural countryside but really green and lush.

Villages are more modern than Romania and Bulgaria with a more affluent feel to this country.

Fuel prices are similar with diesel ranging from \$1.75 per litre - food and alcohol are more expensive.

## **Pecs – Hungary**

### **Our campsite for tonight: Famalia Camping, Pecs**

There is only one campsite listed near this town but it is published as not opening for the season until 1st May.

Thought we would try our luck as the weather had warmed up.

Arrived to locked gates but as the pedestrian gate was open, wandered in.

Lovely treed campsite with concrete pads - some not too level.

Was met by the boss lady who spoke no English, however did speak German.

Said she was not open until May but after using my best German and telling her we were all the way from Australia, she gave in and said one night only.

She locked the pedestrian gate just after we parked and gave us access to the key.

Typed information provided in English was excellent and with Lidl and the bus stop into town only a minute away, we were soon on our way into town, only four stops away and around \$2.00 each way each.

The central town square was alive mostly with university students and a few bus loads of German tourists so it was not difficult to see everything very quickly.

City Hall was amazing as was the cathedral and the many museums.

Had a late lunch on our favourite gyros and local beer (quite a lot more expensive than Romania and Bulgaria) and people watched for some time.

Did lots more sightseeing before heading back.

Had a very quiet pleasant night in a very large space that I am sure come 1 May will be very busy.

## **Friday 6th & Saturday 7th April**

Thanked the boss lady for allowing us to stay out of season.

She was really lovely and proceeded to lock both the vehicular and pedestrian gates as soon as we went through - don't think she wants any more guests until May.

Travelled through some beautiful countryside today.

A few hills now and then which were being ploughed ready for the spring.

There were rectangular patches of different shades of brown and green dotted across the valleys and in the bright sunshine (for a change) was just beautiful.

Shops are now selling colourful potted flowers ready for the window and balcony ledges and in many of the towns there is much activity planting these in public places.

### **Balatonfoldvar – Hungary**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Balatonfoldvar - co ordinates 46.8455. 17.8658**

Situated half way up the eastern side of Lake Balaton, this mixed parking place stands at the top of a hill with spectacular views across the lake.

There is a new museum here with a spiral staircase leading to a viewing tower showcasing views across this massive lake.

No services, however the museum has some free wifi that reaches out to the car park.

Walked down to the small town along a path that is also a bike track.

Evidently there are over 200 kms of bike paths around the lake.

In fact the bike paths everywhere in Hungary stretch for miles and miles through and between towns.

We watched the yacht races on the lake from the marina and Boardwalk.

There is an international Laser youth sailing regatta on over the weekend which has brought young people from many countries as competitors.

This is a great spot and wonderful little town so stayed an extra night for some r & r.

#### **Sunday 8th and Monday 9th April**

### **Budapest – Hungary**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Budapest – GPS 47.4827N 19.0553E**

Spent three wonderful days and two nights here.

What a great city - well laid out - easy to drive our Ziggy bus through - wide streets - clean - great bikeways - wonderful sightseeing - and just the best parking spot.

Hungarian national Election Day today (on a Sunday?) so hoped we could get a spot in town.

We arrived mid morning Sunday and already there were only a few spots left.

The parking is right beside the Danube on the Buda side with a short five minute walk to Freedom Bridge and all the sightseeing you could wish for within an easy walking distance.

Almost a summers day today, the sun is shining brilliantly so took advantage and hit the tourist trail immediately.

First stop was the Citadel and Buda Castle district.

Massive climb to the top starting with a visit to the Stone Church which is closed to tourists on a Sunday, however we were lucky enough to get there just as a service was finishing so got a sneak look - just amazing to see the inside of the church walls sculptured out of the rock face.

Another 200 or more steps took us to the top of Gellert Hill where there were 360 degree panoramic views across the whole of Budapest and the meandering Danube River.

Here is the Statue of Liberty and expansive views across to the Royal Palace and Sandor Palace on the Buda side.

Came down the opposite side of Gellert Hill (much easier going down and watched people struggle on their way up - know exactly how they felt!).

Walked across Chain Bridge, the oldest bridge in Budapest, to the Pest side.

There was so much to see here and over the three days we walked so many kms per day that we were exhausted at end of each day.

Some of the sights we saw were:

St Stephens Basilica (only \$1 entrance) - the largest and most impressive church in Budapest.

Heroes' Square - massive square with statues of Hungarian chiefs and kings (really worth the long walk to it).

Vajdahunyad Castle - just opposite Heroes' Square. A romantic looking building and exactly what conjures up in my mind as a "fairytale castle" set in the middle of a beautiful lake and park.

The House of Parliament - the most beautiful building in Budapest - in my opinion. Just spectacular architecture and set on the mighty Danube.

Central Market Hall - closed on Sunday's but really worth a visit. Local fresh fruit and veges and meats, wines and herbs and spices are available at really great prices - certainly lots of tourists taking photos of this unusual building and its local produce.

Vaci Street, Vorosmarty Square and Deak Square - spent many hours walking up and down these very touristy and mostly pedestrian only streets with Curbside cafes, elegant shops and the famous ruin pubs (very funky pubs set in mostly old derelict buildings and transformed into interesting masterpieces).

There was a spring festival held in Deak Square where numerous stalls filled the square and provided the most wonderful smelling and interesting looking foods as well as souvenirs.

Dined out regularly here.

Advice: - the parking spot is just magic as far as location is concerned but was constantly full.

Arrive before 6am or after 9pm during the week or on the weekend as locals take up these free spots really early and many stay till late to enjoy what the city has to offer.

It can be quite noisy as the car park is part of a road with central street parking.

We just sat and watched the cruise boats on the Danube, bikers, runners and walkers taking in the magnificent river Boardwalk.

The lights across the Danube to the Pest side were just stunning in the evenings.

### **Tuesday 10th April**

Another beautiful sunny day today and we are so enjoying being able to wear short sleeved shirts for a change and hope this is the start of a warmer Spring.

Headed away from the hustle and bustle and noise of cars, sirens and trams, buses and boats into the countryside.

Somewhere before we arrived in Budapest we managed to get a slow leak in the rear right hand tyre – similar to the previous one we picked up at the Helsinki Zoo in Finland – the tyre pressure would drop from around 5.5 bar to 3 bar in about 2 days – not sure whether a leaky valve, a puncture or a slightly buckled rim which will let air out with tubeless tyres.

Decided not to look for a tyre repair shop in Budapest because of the traffic congestion and so headed out in a south westerly direction towards the Slovenian border and look for a sign that said “Gumiabroncs Javitas” which is Hungarian for tyre repairs.

Found one near the town of Szekesfehervar but they only did trucks so pressed on – found another in the town of Veszprem – they had a laugh and a giggle and referred us to an Autoklub place about 2 klms away.

It was a very modern repair shop with about 8-10 staff – I tried English but no one spoke a word – I tried German but no one spoke a word (surprising).

We had keyed in a message onto one of our Ipads in English and translated to Hungarian about the problem with the tyre.

I asked Krys to bring that message up on the Ipad screen and went back inside the shop and showed them the message – I did not check the message before I handed the Ipad over.

There was a man and a woman behind the counter – they looked at me strangely and just smiled – then the man led me in to the workshop and passed me over to the foreman who also looked at me strangely, smiled and took out his mobile phone and spoke to a few different people.

I started thinking something was amiss but because of the language problems couldn't get him to stop dialling on his mobile.

I took our Ipad back off him turned it around and had a look at the message on the screen which read in English – “We are looking for a safe place to stay for one night – we have our own shower, toilet and electricity – can we stay here for one night or can you advise of somewhere where we might be able to stay”.

I laughed and then put the correct message on the screen and showed it to him – he laughed and then started organising to get Ziggy in to the workshop to fix the tyre – they noticed the AUS sticker next to the number plate and the Australian flags in the shape of the map of Australia on the body panels and smiled.

They had modern hydraulic hoists but because of Ziggy’s size we could not get her on the hoists and so had to use the small bottle jack that Mike Steers had lent to us.

It was quite a task with the small jack but they got the tyre off and found a huge screw embedded in the tyre and they then proceeded to plug the hole.

I went back in to the office with credit card in hand to make payment but they refused to charge us.

I said that we insisted on paying but they still refused.

We had spent all our Hungarian cash as we were heading to Slovenia but still had a wad of Euro notes as they can be used in most countries.

I had to force the Euro notes in to the mechanics hand and step away quickly – he did not want to accept the money.

The staff then ushered us out the driveway and waved goodbye.

What a fantastic experience – one we will not forget – genuine hospitality towards foreign visitors – yet another case of being really well looked after because we were from Australia.

### **Hegymagas – Hungary**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Hegymagas - GPS. 46.8352N 17.4500E**

Just the perfect remedy as this magic spot high on a hill has stunning views across vineyards, mountains and the Lake Balaton in the distance.

Only a small village with quaint houses all with their own vineyards and wine tasting on offer.

Only a few spots are available and we were pleased to see another motorhome for the first time in ages.

Heinz is German and Gabi is Hungarian but Heinz has lived in South Africa for about 8 years and had a distinct South African accent (even in German).

We spent many enjoyable hours talking with them and hope to catch up again as they are heading in the same direction as we are.

Then along came David from Kent, UK, with his rather large dog on a walk up the hill.

So very British, it was funny to hear such a broad British accent in this part of the woods.

He has lived in Hungary on and off for twenty years and told us quite a few funny yarns about the area.

He has a house and vineyard not far from where we parked – next to a mountain spring with beautiful fresh water.

This little village looks about to boom with renovations of a guest house and old church well underway.

So tranquil and picture perfect - really enjoyed our stay here.

We enjoyed our stay in Hungary – the roads were better than Bulgaria and Romania and we always felt safe no matter where we went – the people were friendly and understanding of foreign tourists.

## Slovenia

Slovenia has a land mass of just over 20,000 km<sup>2</sup> with over 50% being covered in forests and a population of just over 2 million.

The capital is Ljubljana, the main language is Slovenian and the currency is Euro.

There are no regulations against wild camping but it is not generally accepted – ask if in doubt.

## Wednesday 11th April

Being a Schengen country, the border crossings again were a non event where there were no inspections or customs booths.

## Ljutomer – Slovenia

### **Our campsite for tonight: Gostilna Trnek, Ljutomer – GPS 46.555161N 16.219290E**

Set beside three lakes and a forest reserve and surrounded by green fields, this Inn has a spectacular location and did not even insist on a meal in return for free parking.

We dropped inside to make sure we were permitted to park for the night and were greeted with a warm smile and shown where to park just outside the Inn on the grass.

There are so many beautiful places around the lakes where seats have been provided to just sit and watch the ducks go by.

As it was lunchtime, we strolled over to the Inn and sat in the warm sunshine and had a pre lunch Slovenian beer and booked ourselves in for dinner at 7pm.

Walking tracks and information about the reserve were posted beside the first lake so armed with a bottle of water, a jacket (just in case it got cold or we got lost) headed off through the forest reserve.

There were 5 information boards along the 2.5 km track but there were times when we reached a fork in the road with no signage, that we wondered if we could find our way back.

There were lots of track indicators along the way in the form of coloured ribbons, empty water bottles hanging from trees, a tyre and of all things - an old muffler.

We came across loggers in the forest and tractors hauling out timber and finally reached the river where there was a ferry to take you across to the town of Mura.

Not sure if it was large enough to take a Ziggy bus across.

Sat and watched the ferrymen on the other side for a while and then headed back hopeful of finding the track indicators on the way back.

Felt a bit like Hansel and Gretel and thank heavens the ribbons were not eaten by the birds.

The forest itself was beautiful with a few causeways running across streams where there were ducks and swans swimming happily - so peaceful with only the streams and birds to be heard.

Took just over two hours to get back and have a rest before dinner.

All day the Inn was abuzz with local men coming in and having a man's chat and beer before venturing home.

The same in the evening when we came in for dinner.

We sat in the small dining room and listened to a group of men chat and laugh for many hours - they were still there when we left and have to say, the clear liquid they were drinking was definitely not water.

The dinner was a country feast with Rob's Zander or fresh water perch and my veal scallopini filling the whole of a large plate - we could not finish it.

The owner - also the barman - was asleep when we approached him at the bar for the bill. I think he too had been drinking some of that clear liquid.

### **Thursday 12th April**

#### **[Maribor – Slovenia](#)**

**Our campsite for tonight: Gostilna Koblarjev Zaliv, Maribor – GPS 46.565559N 15.619740E**

Another Inn situated just on the outskirts of the large town of Maribor.

The river setting was very pretty with a small bridge to take you across the river to the Inn side.

Very quiet in the day and night with only a few walkers passing by.

Requirement here was to pay a small parking fee or have dinner, so for the second night in a row, my driver took the navigator out to dinner.

This time we were the only people in the dining room and enjoyed a fabulous seafood risotto which we could not finish and took the rest home in a doggy bag.

### **Friday 13th April - black Friday**

First town we have seen with a Harvey Norman store - all the way over here - very strange as we had not seen another one anywhere else.



Just have to keep repeating over and over again how very awesome and breathtaking the scenery is in Slovenia.

A beautiful, beautiful clean country with absolutely no signs of anything derelict.

We passed by rolling lush green hills topped with acres of pine forests and dotted with little villages of quaint Tyrollean style homes with mansard or alpine roofs - reminds us so much of Austria.

### Lubljana – Slovenia

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Tivoli 2, Lubljana - GPS 46.0598N 14.4975E**

Comments regarding rates in the Park4nite APP are very confusing.

Parked in Tivoli 2 where at the boom gate it gives two rates with a car costing €0.60 per hour between 6am-8pm Monday to Friday (weekends free) and motorhomes €2.40 per hour 6am-8pm and €6.00 from 8pm to 6am (seven days a week) = €39.60 for 24 hours.

Definitely do not want motorhomes to stay here. However, when you take a ticket on entry there is no option to select car or motorhome.

We had already taken a ticket from the auto machine at boom gates and parked before we did a google translate to discover what the sign really said.

Terrified at the prospects of the potential cost, we took our ticket back to the gate and inserted it in to get a reading - €0.60 it said, the car rate.

Fantastic, we thought - the sign must be an old one so happily set off to do a quick trip around the town before our full day here tomorrow.

Didn't get far enough to see a lot but the exercise was welcomed.

Found a great place just across the road from the carpark called Union Brewery which was packed with locals in the outside beer garden so decided to venture in for some early dinner and sample some different beers.

The venison goulash with rolled dumplings was superb and was served with a basket full of hot fresh buns to soak up the goulash.

Shared one between the two of us - yum, yum, yum!

The pub filled up quickly inside and watching the locals was a real hoot.

This unique place is really worth a visit.

Checked our ticket again as we walked back past the boom gate and it read €2.40 after about four hours.

Feeling confident all was well, we settled down to some reading while watching the comings and goings in the car park.

At 7.30pm there was a knock at our window which we opened slightly.

The man spoke to us in Slovenian and the gist of the conversation mostly via sign language was telling us we had to move out as we were not allowed to stay overnight here.

Having had a few drinks, there was no way we were legally able to drive.

Took out our iPad with Google translate and asked the person for identification as it appeared he was asking for cash in addition to what we would pay through the automatic machine.

We showed him our ticket which he quickly snatched away.

Scary, because without it there was no way past the boom gates.

We asked to speak to an English supervisor.

He phoned someone, we have no idea who, spoke and then handed the phone to us.

This person, after finding out we were in Tivoli 2 said we were OK to stay.

He spoke to the man who then gave us back our ticket and waved goodbye (with a not so happy face).

At no time did he show us any identification.

We left very early next morning, hoping to be able to get through the boom gates before our not so happy man arrived for work.

Paid a total of €4.80 (very happy) though we suspect that this man is responsible for getting the extra motorhome rate.

All inner street parking is chargeable on an hourly rate and all parking stations charge a whopping penalty rate for motorhomes.

Did not stay on in this non friendly motorhome town.

### **Saturday 14th & Sunday 15th April**

After leaving Lubljana with a sigh of relief, we travelled through beautiful valleys and saw many snow capped mountains still open for skiing.

Our first stop was the touristy Bled Lake.

A stunning huge lake with a small castle on an island in the middle.

Bled Castle sits on a sheer rock face high above the lake and the township.

After parking in town (parking meters everywhere) took the long hike up the hill (there is paid parking at the top at €3.00 per hour).

Busloads of Asians and tourists everywhere.

Far from our favourite castle as it has been renovated and is somewhere between old and new and set up as a museum inside.

We don't think it is worth the effort to go inside the castle, though would go to the top just to see the panoramic view across the lake.

Tried to find a place to stay overnight around the lake but most refused to take motorhomes even though they had signs up saying motorhomes were allowed and displaying their fees which were 4 times the price of cars – they said motorhomes

took up too much room - very unfriendly area for motorhomes particularly on weekends.

Frustrated we headed out of town into the countryside.

The dedicated camping parks of course available at a huge cost.

### Trzic – Slovenia

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Dovzan Gorge, near Trzic- GPS 46.3789N 14.3245E**

Only a couple kms past the small village of Trzic we found our ultimate dream spot sitting right in the middle of Dovzan Gorge.

Set on a level gravel patch this parking spot (takes about 8 motorhomes) was right beside the clear crystal waters of a mountain stream in full flow with waterfalls cascading down the valley.

The water was so fresh we filled our tanks.

Spent two quiet relaxing days walking through the Gorge and staying away from the weekend crowds in the Bled area.

The locals have provided this magic spot at no cost and are trying to encourage tourists to come here.

Give it ten stars if you don't need services except water - just breathtaking.

### **Monday 16th April**

On the return journey on the other side of Trzic, we found a dedicated motorhome area overlooking the beautiful town, which provided all services and couldn't find a pay station so would be free - they are definitely looking to attract tourists.

We didn't stay here and moved on toward Lake Bohinj.

Towards the end of the lake, there is the Triglav National Park which is the home to the Bohinj Waterfall.

A very steep climb with 20 minutes of steps all the way (as usual) rewarded us with a spectacular view and thunderous noise and water spray of the falls - really worth the effort.

Could not stay overnight here in the national park so headed down into the valley.

### Bohinjska Bistrica – Slovenia

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Bohinjska Bistrica - GPS 46.276161N 13.958880E**

A very unusual spot for motorhomes only, set beside a railway line above the town with views across to the snow capped mountains and valleys.

Only heard the car train a couple of times during the day but very quiet at night.

Normally a cost of around €10 but free off season.

### **Tuesday 17th April**

Woke up to another beautiful day where the church below appeared to be sitting on a low cloud and with this in the foreground and the snow capped mountains in the background - was awesome.

### Idrija – Slovenia

**Our campsite for tonight: Veri Krajnik, Idrija - GPS 45.998623N 14.025956E-  
address: Carl Jakoba 9, Idrija**

10€ incl all services and Internet.

This is private property that can take 3 easily and up to 5 Mohos at a pinch.

Best to phone first to check on availability 00386 41 725 262 as it is a very narrow, steep and windy road.

Veri, the owner, speaks excellent English and some German and spent some time providing information about this UNESCO world heritage town.

He drove us down into town and showed us where some of the sights we needed to visit were and also a shortcut back up the hill for the way home.

This town is the home to the 2nd largest Mercury mine in the world.

It officially closed down in 2007 and is now open for tourists only. Very interesting walk down into and through the mine and the guide provided excellent information. Another 200 steps - more punishment to these old legs but really worth it.

The town produces some of the finest lace in Slovenia and many shops proudly display their wares.

Spent time in one of the many squares with a pint before making our way up the hill back home.

Had to stop a couple of times to catch our breath as it is quite a hike.

The views from this campspot are across the mountains, valleys and the village below and at night we enjoyed just a coffee while overlooking the towns lights below.

### **Wednesday 18th April**

Veri was disappointed we did not want to stay on longer and said he would be our guide for today if we wanted to stay on.

Our vignette runs out tomorrow so we are keen to make it across the Croatian border on Thursday.

Our visit to the Skocjan Caves, another UNESCO site, is situated not far from the town of Divaca.

This was just one of the many highlights of our trip through Slovenia.

It comprises numerous caves and passages, natural bridges and sink holes.

This is a 1.5 hour walk through the caves where the centre cave is the largest we have ever seen.

Thunderous mountain streams and waterfalls fall at the bottom of the cavern.

Just awesome walking along the well lit paths and one could be reminded of Jules Verne's - A journey to the Centre of the Earth.

Another 500 + steps, though not all at once, was just what we needed, but the experience was one we were pleased we did not miss - photography in the caves was sadly not permitted.

### Pivka – Slovenia

**Our campsite for tonight: Park Military History, Pivka - GPS 45.668610N 14.190080E**

This is a Super motorhome spot supplied for all by the Park of Military History.

For €10 with all services including electricity and great Wifi as well as one ticket to the museum, it rates highly as one of the better spots.

The pitches are on level bitumen, well lit, security cameras and a view across the valley below as a bonus.

We arrived in time to register at the museum reception but the museum itself closed at 3pm so will visit it tomorrow.

Wanted to eat at the cafeteria which gets wonderful ratings but it was booked out by a large group and is generally not open after museum hours.

### **Thursday 19th April**

The museum features many tanks, planes etc from the second world war but also has a large section on the "Road to Independence" which presents the process of gaining independence in the Republic of Slovenia with an emphasis on the independence war of 1991.

### Croatia

Croatia has a land mass of 56,538 km<sup>2</sup>, a population of around 4.5 million and has 1244 islands along the Adriatic coastline.

The capital is Zagreb, the currency is Kuna and the official language is Croatian.

There are currently around 4.67 Kuna to the Aussie Dollar.

We are quite excited as we approach Croatia as we have heard so much about this country from family and friends.

It is a beautiful day and we are in shorts and summer clothes for pretty much the first time or maybe the second time in our fourteen months away with most of these months being equivalent to and mostly colder than home.

The sunshine and warmth is a welcome relief.

The daytime temperature is a wonderful 25 degrees.

We have no issues at the border as we pass firstly from Slovenia with a stamp and then into Croatia with another stamp – a little surprised at the 2 passport checks as both are Schengen countries and therefore supposedly no boundary – apparently

the Syrian illegal immigrants have been accessing central and northern Europe through Croatia so maybe that explains the checks.

There are no vignettes required to be purchased here and within a couple of kms, we reached our first toll booth.

Much more civilised here where you take a ticket on entering the motorway and only pay for the distance you travel.

Wild camping is not allowed in Croatia and we have heard differing reports about what is acceptable.

We have opted to take the safe way out and stay in campsites and live the Life of Riley while we are in this beautiful country.

There are campsites around every corner - obviously the tourist industry is the major industry here and campsites are quite expensive compared to other countries we have travelled through.

Even private home owners and restaurants have joined the band wagon and advertise rates to park in their yards and car parks.

Restaurants offer free parking in exchange for a meal (usually at inflated prices).

### **Thursday 19th & Friday 20th April**

We have moved from a tree to sea change and are relishing the change and so enjoying seeing the sea again.

### **Krk – Croatia**

### **Our camp for two nights: Autokemp Bor, Krk – GPS 45.022885N 14.560945E**

Our next toll is to cross the bridge to the Island of Krk - only around \$10 and no toll on the way back.

We travelled through the town and up a hill for about a km to this camping spot.

Still not many motorhomes about, but we can feel the tension as the holiday season is just around the corner.

This campsite is gearing up to be double its size before July.

It is perched on a hill with limited views across to the sea.

Wandered down at dinner time to the village which is really quaint with many restaurants along the harbourfront.

They even have two red submarines in the harbour (can be hired for sea trips) and some very unusual statues set in a garden that is now blooming with spring flowers.

After some exploring, settled down for dinner in a waterfront fish restaurant and tried out their seafood risotto - very good!

Most campsites take euros so as we had not had time to change money, the campsite and the restaurant happily took our euros until we found an ATM.

The bathrooms in the campsite are the best we have experienced but the electricity which is included in the price is about 50 metres away and water not much closer.

The staff were very helpful and provided long extension cords but we found a drop off in power because of it.

Great little spot nonetheless and we enjoyed the two days spent here.

### **Saturday 21st April**

All parking in towns is by prepaid parking tickets and even some supermarkets charge parking.

Outside of the town there are lots of free magic places to stop for a break and take some great snapshots.

### **Senj – Croatia**

#### **Our camp for tonight: Restaurant Martina, Senj**

Decided to try the restaurant option - meal in exchange for parking.

This restaurant was perched high on a hill with nothing short of breathtaking views across the sea.

Booked in for dinner with front row seats on a balcony in a really beautiful restaurant, with a spectacular sunset.

We were disappointed at the quantity served (not much bigger than a child's serve) and the price was ridiculous - very tasty otherwise.

Decided there and then in future, to choose our campsite and then chose where we wanted to eat.

### **Sunday 22nd & Monday 23rd April**

More perfect weather and from the future forecasts we were in for at least a week of sunny skies, no cloud and early summer temperatures.

The first two campsites we selected were closed until further notice - very frustrating to say the least as much time is wasted driving there only to find they are closed.

### **Seline – Croatia**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Autocamp Pisak, Seline - GPS 44.272888N 15.477690E**

This is a lovely treed campsite right on the Adriatic Sea with all facilities and Internet for only €18.

The beaches here are small pebbles only with no sand but again the views across the sea, like home, are amazing.

Went for a long walk on the beach then to a boardwalk and small Marina and passed by many restaurants that were not open for the season as yet.

Nearly every property on the beachfront offered some kind of caravan or boat storage or motorhome parking.

Ralf and Martina from Germany parked in behind us and soon Rob went over to say hello.

Ralf has an amazing American accent and we were not sure if he was an American pretending to be German or a German pretending to be American.

We spent many wonderful hours chatting and laughing and not sure if we should speak English or German - we spoke both.

Decided to stay on another day and did much the same on day 2.

It is just so wonderful to be in shorts and we felt hot for the first time since leaving home 14 months ago.

### **Tuesday 24th April**

Left around midday with the promise of trying to catch up again with Martina and Ralf somewhere in Croatia or back in Germany where we have an offer to spend time at their home near the Black Forrest and with a reciprocal to them to visit us in Australia.

We travelled back on the A1 again today with another toll but again only cost a few dollars.

Wanted to stay on the outskirts of Zadar and travel in from there to see the town, but the campsite we wanted was situated next to a cement factory (we had just had two magnificent days on the beach) so moved on into town in a free parking area only - GPS 44.113201N 15.236500E

Great parking spot occupied by buses and ambulances and a few cars and only a 15-20 minute walk to the Old Town (Stari Grad).

Well worth the visit as the Old Town included many great old buildings, quaint narrow cobble stoned streets with open air restaurants and much of the architecture having a Roman influence.

The boardwalk around the harbour passed by some beautiful parklands with spring flowers in gardens now in full bloom.

At the end of the boardwalk, many tourist buses were parked and Asian and British tourists were everywhere.

The feature at the end of the boardwalk is a sea organ, where the waves hitting the concrete boardwalk walls pass through various size pipes and create different sounds much like an organ.

We waited until a tour boat went past and the sounds were intensified by the wake caused by the boats.

Couldn't resist an ice cream from one of the shops in Old Town before heading back to Ziggy and moving on to camp somewhere for the night.

### **Pakostane – Croatia**

**Our campsite for tonight: Camping Kozarica, Pakostane - GPS 43.911011N 15.499630E**

Quite a large campsite with great ratings.



We arrived at 5pm after rejecting some other spots and asked if we could just have a park for the night without all the trimmings as we intended to leave early next morning.

Reception offered us a park just outside the main gates, where we could stay, have electricity (which we didn't need ) Internet and use of the camp bathrooms for €6.

Perfect and we could go for a stroll on the beach as well in the morning - who could ask for more!

### **Wednesday 25th Thursday 26th April**

Had received some photos from Martina and Ralf about the campsite they are staying in which looked amazing so headed there, though not expecting them to still be there.

### **Murter – Croatia**

### **Our campsite for two nights: Camp Slanica, Murter - GPS 43.816830N 15.576950E**

Quite a narrow road leading to the campsite but fell in love with it as soon as we arrived.

It is a mid size campsite (some larger sites have around 3000 camping, motorhome, tent and caravan sites) with the motorhomes sites getting prime seafront pitches.

Soon found Martina and Ralf only a few Mohos behind us so continued where we left off in Seline.

Took the bikes off the rack for the first time in months and we all headed to town for dinner.

Martina had discovered this fish restaurant on an earlier bike ride so booked us all in for 7pm.

Had a super night with absolutely delicious fresh fish - though we were surprised at the cost.

Lesson learned - ask the price before ordering the fish.

Time to head the couple of kms home (in the dark).

Three of the four of us took it easily in their stride, while this little navigator struggled and wobbled all the way home - had not experienced riding in the dark before, even though our lights were excellent, I still struggled and sadly walked my bike home for the last few minutes.

Ended the night in our Moho with a reasonable bottle of New Zealand Sav Blanc and finally got to bed sometime much much later.

Not an early start next morning for any of us and we enjoyed a late breakfast, then lunch just reading, relaxing and finally mid afternoon hitting the bikes again for a couple of hours before dinner.

We caught up with some fishermen who donned wet suits and showed us some interesting sea urchins they had caught and would sell to the markets at around €70 kg.

The campsite started filling up quickly after lunch.

The activity on the water intensified with a huge number of sailing boats in full sail passing by us and we watched fishing boats bringing in their nets.

Dressed for dinner in our best shorts and headed for Chateau de Ralf de Martina for a German BBQ feast.

Had the best meal and was introduced to "sundowners" (champagne and grapefruit syrup) and sheep feta cheese (Scharf Kase) which was wrapped in alfoil with shallots and tomato and secret herbs and the best baked potatoes we have ever tasted.

Ate like kings and finally waddled home (only three doors up) for a late coffee before hitting the hay.

### **Friday 27th April**

Said our goodbyes, though expecting we will run into each other again before leaving Croatia.

### **Trogir – Croatia**

#### **Our campsite for tonight Trogir - GPS 43.511560N 16.246774E**

Not a huge number of camp sites to choose from and headed for one on the island (Park4nite App) which was just a short downhill walk to the Old Town.

The site was a bit of a shock as it was fully overgrown with grass and the entrance was so narrow and on an uphill hairpin bend.

Didn't stay there but right next door on the high side is a huge carpark where the boom gates were locked open so we ventured in and looked for a pay station.

Appears that this has not been operational for a while so took advantage, parked and headed into town.

Magic town set on a fabulous harbour full of yachts and massive cruisers owned no doubt by the rich and famous.

The Old Town though only small is considered to be one of the best preserved Romanesque-Gothic towns in Central Europe (got that straight out of the brochure!) and was a real treat and just so interesting with its old castle and fortress right on the point - another UNESCO site.

Can't believe how hot it has become so quickly and soon we found a very shady place to sit and have "our must have local beer" and watch the passing parade.

There were many shady outdoor restaurants on the harbourfront to choose from.

Came back to Ziggy which was now in the shade (very grateful for that) and had a calm peaceful night.

### **Saturday 28th and Sunday 29th April**

## Split – Croatia

### **Our campsite for two nights: Camping Stobrec, Split - GPS 43.504169N 16.525829E**

Wow what a great place.

Has won many awards for being the best set up campsite over many years.

Takes around 150 campers with the pitches being large and shady and some facing directly onto the white pebbled beach - still can't get used to rocks on the beach but the locals don't seem to mind and happily sit on towels in the sun.

We are only one spot from the beach and have fabulous water views even though the campsite was full most of the weekend and lots of families with kids.

Around 100 meters to the bus stop which leaves every 30 minutes to Split Old Town.

The Old Town is called Diocletian's Palace which is one of the best preserved monuments of Roman architecture - another UNESCO site.

We rate it very highly and put it in our 5 top Old Towns to visit.

The narrow cobbled stone streets weave in and out with multi level stone buildings with little restaurants in every nook and cranny - some built directly into old roman stone walls.

The boardwalk is a tourist Mecca with stalls selling souvenirs and waterfront restaurants eager to entice the tourist to spend more tourist dollars.

Queues formed around every ice cream shop where the choice of variety of flavours was astounding.

Several churches and cathedrals are found in the central square as are Roman statues and frescoes.

We even saw a wedding party outside the cathedral but not a lot of privacy for them as busloads of Asian tourists mingled with them taking happy snaps (mainly selfies) while they were waiting to enter the cathedral.

### **Monday 30th April**

Had some difficulty finding a campsite that was suitable.

Many are really expensive and a lot insist on cash only (and are reluctant to issue receipts) - bit of a tax rip off we expect, but nice for the pocket.

## Opuzen – Croatia

### **Our campsite for tonight: Opuzen - GPS 43.0292N 17.5514E**

A little private farm just off the road but lush green well kept grassed pitches set amongst the mandarin orchard.

Limited facilities with electricity and water, one bathroom, one shower and a washing machine included in the €10 per person price - but the friendliest host ever.

Sat in the shade reading when our host arrived with a large plate and filled it with marinated cherries and whipped cream and a nip of the best alcoholic cherry syrup we have ever tasted - 27% proof he told us (included in the camping price).

Also presented us with a litre bottle of fresh mandarin juice.

He sells all kinds of fresh fruit and vegetables and we sampled some of his produce - not cheap - but fresh.

We met a young Dutch couple who arrived on their bikes towing a carriage with two small dogs in it.

We had seen them some miles back going up a large steep hill and commented on the carriage they were towing.

They are biking around the world over a two year period but only to places that allow dogs to campsites.

Ah to be young again - what a wonderful adventure and was very envious of them.

### **Tuesday 1st and Wednesday 2nd May**

#### **[Dubrovnik – Croatia](#)**

#### **Camping Kate, Mlini (near Dubrovnik). GPS 42.624809N 18.208349E**

Located approximately 7kms from Dubrovnik, this small campsite was suggested by Ralf and Martina and was selected as it is a short water taxi ride right into the centre of Dubrovnik's Old Town.

Met with Ralf & Martina mid afternoon and headed down the 180 steps to the waterfront to check out the timetable for tomorrow's visit.

Very beautiful waterfront area with lots of bars, restaurants and accommodation.

Sampled one of these bars and sat under a thatched roof right above the waterline.

It was a fabulous sunny day so soaked up the atmosphere before hiking back up the 180 steps.

Set off around 9.30 am to catch the 10am taxi.

Such a pleasant way to go instead of the bus and thoroughly enjoyed the cool breeze and water views along the way.

The water taxi ride costs 100 Kunas/person return which is around \$22 and really worth it.

Soon we approached the harbour and were in awe of the magnificence of this town.

Wrapped up and surrounded by the ancient fortress walls, this town is awesome.

We entered Pile Gate into the main square and were greeted with marble streets and baroque buildings.

Entertainers were in the main square and the Old Town was alive with tourists from every nation.

There were three large cruise ships in the harbour and we were inundated with British and Asian groups led by pushy tour leaders.

We were inspired by the walk along the fortress walls, quoted as being the finest in the world, where at every corner there were spectacular views across to the Adriatic Sea and surrounding islands.

Looming above the city is Mt Srd which is connected to Dubrovnik by cable car.

The fortress wall walk is really worth the 150 Kunas/person (\$34 AUD) and after 3 hours and over 1000 steps offered 360 degree views of the Old Town (and for this navigator some very sore knees).

Headed away from the Main Street and the crowds to find one of the many interesting little restaurants which can be found in abundance in every narrow cobbled stone street and found it hard to choose one because of the huge variety.

Another hike uphill where we found one of our choosing and sat and enjoyed a very long and well deserved rest.

Found our way back to the harbour after some more sightseeing of some amazing cathedrals and churches and caught the 4.30 pm water taxi back.

Another 180 steps to climb that ended a truly wonderful fun day.

Don't think any of us moved from our chairs for what was left of this day.

A "must do" on the bucket list for Croatia as it would be high on our list of top 5 Old Towns to visit.

Calculated we had done around 1500 steps today apart from all the normal walking!

### **Thursday 3rd and Friday 4th May**

Renee, Shannon and Glen visited Hvar Island around 2006 and recommended we visit there.

We planned to go to Hvar for a couple of days in late April on the way south to Dubrovnik but the campsites were not due to open until the first week of May.

There were parking areas available but we dared not risk these - have heard horror stories of fines for wild camping in Croatia.

On the way back from Dubrovnik heading north we found out that the campsites on Hvar were full of Polish students on their Spring break so we decided not to go there, unfortunately.

So we moved on to meet up with Ralf and Martina in Kamp Galeb in Omis but that campsite was also full of Polish students and we were advised if we wanted a quiet night, then Camp Galeb was not the place to be.

Phoned our friends who had arrived here before us and decided to move on to Autocamp Sirena instead.

### **Omis – Croatia**

**Our campsite for two nights: Autocamp Sirena, Omis - GPS 43.407261N 16.776859E**

Only a few kms away from Kamp Galeb, this is very much a motorhome site only with steep windy roads within the campsite to pitches etched out of the hillside giving most a panorama view across the Adriatic Sea.

We were lucky enough to get one of the prime positions as we arrived just as this one became vacant.

With Martina and Ralf only a couple of motorhomes behind us, we had another super two days of relaxing and doing not much of anything apart from laughing, drinking and eating while having this five star view.

Only downside for me was the bathrooms were on level one at the top and we were three levels down.

Certainly knew I had knees on day one here but better on day two.

### **Saturday 5th May & Sunday 6th May**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Kamp Galeb, Omis - GPS 43.441719N 16.682159E**

Arrived here to find Polish students still packing down after a long week of festivities.

Rubbish and bottles were still everywhere and old tents (obviously no longer functioning, left behind).

Looked like a battle scene with many of the soldiers still wandering around in a drunken stupor.

Think they had a lot of fun as the staff looked absolutely exhausted as they tried to handle the hundreds still waiting in line to check out.

Ralf & Martina had already found a site for both of us, so check in was easy and soon with deck chairs and awnings out, we settled into another two days of relaxation.

This is a huge beachfront resort site with cabins, beach deck chairs (a little worse for wear after the onslaught of students) beach volley ball courts and beachfront restaurant.

The mountains rising high above the town looked like they had been painted - so steep and different shades of grey and green.

Ventured into town where the harbour was abuzz with boats and people.

Only very small but lots of tourist character with souvenir shops, bars and restaurants along the main strip.

The four of us were very disappointed with the Camp pizza restaurant where staff looked like they did not want to be there.

The menu was only in Croatian and they did not want to give us the time of day to do a translation.

The mixed salad turned out to be lettuce leaves only and the filling on the pizzas was more like a paste rather than filling - we complained and the salad was replaced with something that did look like a mixed salad, eventually.

Both nights, a huge red German registered Rollende Hotel bus arrived around 4pm carrying 26 passengers, tour leader and driver.

The front of the bus had seats for its passengers while the back of the bus was three levels high with 28 beds.

We described it like three tiered coffins with bedside lamps.

There would be just enough room to get into the bed and that is all.

Under these beds and seats, cargo doors opened where huge kitchens with gas topped burners appeared and the driver began the task of cooking dinner for the group.

Chairs and tables plates and cutlery came out and soon the group lined up to get a spoonful of what was in the huge pots?

Must have been tasty as some came back for seconds.

Very disappointed to see huge pots of leftovers of rice and meat dregs swilled with water and thrown recklessly under a camp tree.

Ralf complained to the tour leader and soon the group began picking up their waste and doing the right thing with it.

Had two lovely relaxing days and on our last night with our German (maybe in Ralf's case American as his English sounds American) friends coming to an end - very sad.

We are heading away from the coast tomorrow while they are still wanting the sunshine for the remainder of their 10 days holiday.

### **Monday 7th and Tuesday 8th May**

Time to say farewell to Martina and Ralf again, though this time we are heading in different directions so expect this time it really is farewell - never say never!

We continue to agree that some of the most memorable moments of our trip have been with total strangers who have become friends.

We headed inland away from the coast and after a very long drive today we arrived at our campsite.

### **[Rakovica –\(Plitvicki\) -Croatia](#)**

### **Our campsite for two nights: Camping Bear Plitvicki, Rakovica - GPS 44.947762N 15.637490E**

Only a small campsite with about 30 places, though over the two days it swelled to lots more as campers arrived on bikes and cars and set up tents in every spare spot.

Our site which we thought was ours exclusively ended up with two tents at the back of us - no problem though.

Very quirky little family farm with makeshift buildings for tent campers to sit and eat.

Lots of trees and greenery giving it a very country feel (complete with sheep roaming about in the paddock beside the campsite).

At one time, two young French ladies arrived in a car and began setting up a portable fence around their camp space.

Out came 4 dogs - all different makes and kinds with three very large and one small playing about in this area - didn't think there was room for a tent as well but they proved us wrong.

Not sure where the dogs slept as they were still roaming about well after we went to bed.

Rebooked our spot for the night with management and put two chairs in our space to reserve this and then headed off in Ziggy early to get a good start at Plitvicka National Park and Falls.

Arrived at around 8.30 am, parked in the huge car park adjacent, took a parking ticket and walked across the road to the entry where there was already a queue.

Another 150 Kunas (\$34 \$AUD) entrance fee each and everything they say about this magic kingdom is more than true.

The national park extends over a surface area of 294 square kms and is the largest in Croatia.

It is a UNESCO world heritage site.

The paths and boardwalks take you through rich green forests and over and around lakes, waterfalls and steams.

16 lakes tumble into each other via a series of waterfalls and cascades.

There are over 18kms of wooden footbridges and pathways that take you around the three sections of the park.

It took us nearly six hours in total and that was making use of the parks complimentary shuttle buses and the small river boats which travel between sections 2 and 3.

Doesn't say in the brochure, however you can only take one boat ride (your ticket is stamped) but unlimited bus rides.

Had just the most wonderful day with numerous waterfalls large and small along the way - even saw a rainbow at the big waterfall.

The scenery is spectacular, the numerous cascading waterfalls just so picturesque and the lakes and forests just so beautiful.

This is a "must see" in Croatia and really well done however the signage throughout the park is woeful and very confusing.

We asked questions at the tourist information office several times as did so many other people and have to say these people should not have a job as they were totally rude to so many confused people.

Left with so many memories here and lots of pictures - none doing justice to some of the magic sights.

By the time we left late afternoon, the park was totally crowded with tour groups and school kids - so glad we started early.



The parking price was a surprise to us as cars are charged at 7 Kunas per hour but motorhomes get slugged with a one off charge of 70 Kunas (\$16 \$AUD) regardless of how short or long the stay – till 11pm only – no overnight parking.

Arrived back at Camping Bear to find a tent in the middle of our reserved site.

The man was not very pleasant and it took a few very harsh words from my driver (and the threat that Ziggy might make the tent look a little dishevelled if he didn't move) before he slowly moved to another location.

The manager had told us he had asked him to move earlier.

Settled in for another quiet night and watched as this little farm swelled with tents and campers - hate to think what it would be like in July and August.

All cash money too - what a rip off as I am sure very few of these camp spots would declare total income inc the 25% GST or VAT they are supposedly collecting.

Left next morning very refreshed and ready to leave Croatia to continue our adventures in Slovenia again.

### Croatia summary

Absolutely stunning scenery along the coastline.

In the hinterland the countryside is fairly boring with not much farming land and mostly a shale rock landscape except for the beautiful national parks, lakes and waterfalls.

Croatia appears to be almost totally dependant on tourism for its economy.

Croatia has become quite expensive to tour, compared to most other countries in Europe – diesel over \$2 AUD/ litre, no wild camping, Stellplatz or Aires so forced to stay in camp grounds which are expensive even in the off season and triple in price in summer to over 70 Euros or in excess of \$100 AUD/night – when you are self-contained in a motorhome and don't need all the facilities provided by camp grounds it is a bit annoying to have to pay for facilities you don't need.

Eating out at Restaurants is very expensive and we had some of the smallest serves and worst quality food we have experienced whilst in Europe.

Some of the campsites are not open according to their advertised dates which can be quite inconvenient when touring, arriving late afternoon to find closed gates and then having to move on to another site.

Dubrovnik has one of the best walled old towns we have seen, however when there are cruise boats visiting it is better to stay away and time your visit for another time – there are free Apps available which provide the shore dates of all cruise boats world wide – a very handy App to have.

### Slovenia

**Wednesday 9th May 2018**

The trip across the border again was seamless, however the border guard coming into Slovenia did take quite a long time meticulously going through our passports.

Still no issues with overstaying our Schengen time limit.

The countryside is again a patchwork quilt of greens, greys and browns blanketing the rolling hills and in between were dotted with stately Bavarian style homes - a breath of fresh air.

Though we thoroughly enjoyed Croatia with its magnificent scenery, in our opinion, it has been spoiled by tourism and is now so expensive.

Every nook and cranny has been set up as a camping place and/or restaurant and the service and food in most of those we experienced, has been woeful.

### [Dolenjske Toplice – Slovenia](#)

**Our campsite for tonight: Mali Raj, Dolenjske Toplice - GPS 45.771141N 15.050690E**

Just across the border, we settled into this wonderful little camping spot set along the banks of the Krka River.

We sit and watch the swans lazily fishing in the river and flocks of cranes fly happily above then settle down on the river banks to feed.

The river here is wide and fast flowing and so clear.

This is a naturalist camp but some sections are for people like us who like to keep our clothes on.

There is only one other motorhome here – a Dutch couple who don't like clothes (quite refreshing to be pretty much alone again).

Very friendly owners, however they did try to charge us much more than the APP price but quickly agreed to the listed price when we stood our ground and showed them their listing on our iPad.

Found out from the other motorhomers that they were quoted the APP price not the over inflated price we were asked to pay.

Suggest one should confirm price of every campsite before entering.

### **Thursday 10th May**

First priority was to stock up, so Lidl banked some of our hard earned dollars in exchange for giving us wine and replenishing our drink supplies and of course the freezer and fridge look much healthier again.

Our NAVIE took us on a Cook's tour up and down dale through some quaint little hillside villages and lush tree lined roads which were very windy and narrow so were relieved not to strike a car coming the other way.

### [Kostanjevica na Krki – Slovenia](#)

**Our campsite for tonight: Kostanjevica na Krki - GPS 45.849491N 15.418850E**

Discovered there was a much more direct road NAVIE should have taken us on but our scenic drive was really worth it.

There is obviously a wood worker in this town who has created some woodwork masterpieces out of tree trunks.

These are really interesting and are scattered at the entry to the town and in other places.

The local council has provided five motorhome spaces exclusively for motorhomes - gratis.

They are overlooking a sloping treed parkland and then the Krki river.

We also have views over two sand volleyball courts where a group of 10 young people happily played volleyball from 5pm until dark.

Didn't take long to take a walk around the small town where we see the first signs of brightly coloured flowers in window boxes.

Chose a pub on the riverfront for a quiet ale before heading back to Ziggy to watch our free sports entertainment only metres away.

### **Friday 11th May**

Quite interesting this morning watching tractor after tractor slowly meandering along the highway not far from our campsite.

Counted at least 30 of these, all different shapes and sizes.

Thought there must be a tractor convention and soon after leaving our campsite came across all of these lined up like soldiers on the highway.

Found out later from a service station that today was Tractor Registration day -the only day of the year allocated to registration.

Beautiful scenery as we followed the Krka river to our lunch spot set high on the hill overlooking the town of Sevnica.

We have followed this river through many villages for a few days now. Not sure how long the river is but it is a beautiful blue green colour and is crystal clear.

Passed through the town of Lasko where the brewery for the best Slovenian beer is made.

This whole region is a massive hops plantation and km after km of hops are growing for as far as you can see.

### **Our lunch spot: PZA Castle Sevnica - GPS 46.008820N 15.314930E**

The municipality here has provided gratis motorhome parking with full facilities including electricity and only asks that you spend some money in the township in return.

Only about 100 metres from the castle, it has views across the town, valley and beautiful river below and would be an ideal place to stay for one or more nights.

Visited the castle which rests in the heart of some amazing grounds of gigantic trees and flowering shrubs whilst down the hillside there are tiered grape vines.

The entry area has a bar cafe and tourist office with many maps of the district available. The centre courtyard is a mass of colour with the three level walls of the castle surrounding the courtyard.

### Vrbje – Slovenia

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking Vrbje, Vrbje - GPS 46.240849N 15.154000E**

Another wonderful venture by the local municipality where there are 4 free parking dedicated motorhome spots with full facilities to be used on a "user pay basis" - for next to nothing.

The setting is adjacent to parkland and at the entrance to a nature reserve which is a forest surrounding a Lake fed by the Savinja River.

There are magic walking tracks and bike tracks around the lake and is a very popular spot for the locals to walk and ride.

We found some more unusual tree trunk art along the way - some of it just so clever.

Really worth the walk or ride around as it is so green and peaceful with only the sounds of the river and birds keeping us company.

Met a British couple who told us about a bistro and cafe bar not far away so as it was the drivers turn to cook, headed in that direction only to find that the meaning of bistro is not the same as at home and served only drinks.

Returned back to Ziggy to find the four spots available taken up with five motorhomes.

Two Slovenian, one French and one Brit and ourselves.

Quickly befriended the two Slovenian motorhomers who bought over their pear brandy to try - wow, certainly took the breath away but was so good.

After receiving a bit of local knowledge, Davorin, Mojca, Darko and Veruska and their little white fluffy dog Lunar, took us for a 2 km walk into the town of Zalec.

In the centre of town they have built a square with the feature being a beer fountain which is open until 9pm.

You purchase a special designer beer glass designed by Oscar Kogoj and then start a beer tasting of 6 local boutique beers.

Our friends would not let us purchase the glasses and wanted us to have a souvenir of Slovenia and something to remember them by - how wonderful was that.

There are seven fountain dispensers, one for glass cleaning and the other six for the beers.

We arrived at 8.30pm so only had half an hour to complete the task.

Just enough time as we had just filled the last glass when the fountains automatically shut down and disappeared below the surface.

There is a stick on labelled code at the bottom of the glass which counts the number of samples you have had.

Another 2kms back home and then the party began.

More of that clear pear brandy brew came out as well as beers and a few platters of snacks (inc some which were raw meat)- guess the driver owes me another meal.

### **Saturday 12th May**

The Driver was a little worse for wear as he tried to keep up with our Slovenian friends while the navigator changed to coffee on return from the beer fountain.

Such lovely young people.

We had so much fun yesterday (shame the French and British couple did not want to join us) but now it was time to say another goodbye to some more people who have made our trip so special and will always be remembered.

All other Mohos left early but we stayed on until after lunch.

### **Maribor – Slovenia**

**Our campsite for tonight: Gostilna Koblarjev Zaliv, Maribor. – GPS 46.565559N 15.619740E**

Didn't realise until we arrived, that we had spent a night here in April on our way down toward Croatia but as we had such a great meal and night last time, we stayed again.

This peaceful and quiet campsite is at a tavern set on a lake with bike and walking trails going for miles.

We were lucky enough to join in on a Slovenian wedding at the tavern which lasted well into the evening.

The food again was so great and inexpensive and the band played some traditional and modern music (though it was interesting listening to a Slovenian version of "Let's twist again - like we did last summer".

What a way to finish our last night in Slovenia.

Great country, great people, great food and drink – would definitely visit a third time

### **Austria – Lakes, vineyards, bike trails and Heurigers**

### **Sunday 13th May**

Bit wet this morning so took a while to get motivated to make a move.

Always like to lay in on a wet day!

We were only a short distance from the border and on arrival the guard waved us through without checking our passports.

Similar scenery to Slovenia, just so green.

We are in spring now and the wild flowers are in full bloom - small purple and yellow flowers with patches of bright red wild poppies are everywhere.

## Eichfeld – Austria

**Our campsite for tonight: Olmuhle Sixt, Eichfeld - GPS 46.738152N 15.745750E**

This is at a farmhouse which used to have a working Oil manufacturing business (pumpkin seed we think).

They have set up part of it as a Stellplatz now with spaces for about 10 Mohos.

Sadly they no longer make the oil here but the buildings are still there as is the original waterwheel - such a pretty setting.

The owners did not speak English but my driver comfortably carried on a conversation with them.

I just love to listen and only help out when asked!

Took advantage of a break in the weather late afternoon and set up our Cadac BBQ, tables and chairs and enjoyed a great meal until the black storm clouds reappeared.

Quickly packed up and were in just in time before the heavens opened up and the heaviest rain we have experienced for a long time prevailed until the morning.

Quite interesting hearing the rain beating down on the roof (so close to our heads in the upper bed) and at times so loud we couldn't hear ourselves speaking.

## **Monday 14th & Tuesday 15th May**

It was still raining quite heavily so decided to go only a short distance.

## St Stefan im Rosenthal – Austria

**Our campsite for tonight: Rosenhalle, St Stefan im Rosenthal - GPS 46.905438N 15.715455E**

The co ordinates listed in NKC are not quite correct but we soon found the campsite only a couple of streets away.

The campsite has lots of lovely trees and scenery and is set beside a small tributary.

Last nights heavy evening rain had caused it to overflow into the adjoining paddocks and the local streets around it were flooded.

Sirens sounded warning the locals of the river flooding and many locals were out and about checking the levels.

We were encouraged to move away from the river to a nearby carpark and stayed there until the levels in the river dropped some hours later.

Still rained throughout the remainder of the day and night but only a drizzle.

Stayed on for another day hoping the weather might clear even though rainy weather is now predicted for the rest of May.

Lots of bike and walking trails in this area but decided a walk was best option for now.

Found a man's store in town where my driver happily walked around selecting lots of little bibs and bobs that he likes to keep as spares in case he may need them - assorted screws, hose clamps etc.

A really great gratis Stellplatz with water and electricity available at a low cost.

### **Wednesday 16th May**

Our Autogas gas tanks were getting low and to our amazement we could not find any LPG in service stations in these little off the beat villages.

Seems the bigger towns only supply LPG in Austria.

Our two large tanks hold enough for about a month in the summer months.

After several kms and passing about 20 service stations with no luck, we stopped and checked out the mylpg.eu website and headed for the closest station - 92kms away - ugh!

Getting late now and once we were filled up with LPG headed for the nearest Moho stop for the night.

### **Oslip – Austria**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Cselley Muhle, Oslip - GPS 47.840969N 16.625120E**

A couple kms outside the town of Eisenstadt, this spot is peaceful and quiet and set in a treed area with vineyards all around and the only building within sight, a beautiful restaurant and accommodation place.

There are no facilities here but was just wonderful with only the birds keeping us company.

### **Thursday - Sunday, 17th - 20th May**

### **Podersdorf am See – Austria**

#### **Our campsite for four nights: Weingut Slaboda, Podersdorf am See - GPS 47.850151N 16.831011E**

We are at the crossroads now where we need to make some major decisions on our planned route over the next few months - only six months left now in Europe as we have booked flights for Dubai at the end of November - didn't want to spend another winter travelling in Europe though we have to admit we successfully avoided most of the really cold weather and snow by going to Portugal, Spain and Greece.

We might change the dates and the destination for our flight bookings as we are having such a great time in Ziggy in Europe but we need to go back to the UK before the end of November anyhow to get the annual MOT and registration for Ziggy.

It's a long weekend in Austria so decided to find a spot where there are lots of bike trails and things to do.

This is a small campsite taking only 14 Mohos.

It has been full pretty much the whole weekend.

As soon as one leaves it is replaced with another shortly after - it is set at a vineyard only a few minutes walk from town and a massive lake (Neusiedler See in Burgenland) where windsurfers and kite surfers happily fly about in a blaze of colour.

Weather is still not great with very little sunshine and lots of cloud and wind but this did not stop everyone from hitting the huge number of bike trails around here.

There were bikes of all sorts many with small trailers carrying children and dogs along for the ride.

Over the four days we attempted the B10 bikeway which runs for 120 kms around the lake - didn't make it all the way round 😊 and had to stop many times at one of the many local Heuriger's (wine bars that serve wine only and antipasto type meals – no beer, no coffee).

The bikeways are very flat so no hard hills to climb thank goodness.

The centre of town is on the lake with a small red and white striped lighthouse being the feature.

Lots of restaurants and ice cream shops which were well frequented on this holiday weekend.

Vineyards are everywhere and of course lots of wineries to try out.

Had a super relaxing four days though there are parts of my body that I am sure will hurt for a few days to come.

### **Monday 21st May**

Today is a public holiday and everything except restaurants and tourist related operators are closed.

Had to wait until 10am to check out as the Heuriger restaurant (with the office) did not open until then, and saw lots of the Mohos leave much much earlier and wonder if they actually paid their fees?

They don't seem to keep a record here of registration plates or names because none were taken on arrival and on departure, they only asked for the number of days we stayed.

First sunny day in a few days so only travelled a short distance further into the countryside.

### **Deutsch Jahrndorf – Austria**

**Our campsite for tonight: Stellplatz 55+, Deutsch Jahrndorf - GPS 48.007858N 17.110861E**

What a delight this little village and the Stellplatz is.

The wide pitches are set amongst beautiful trees and well maintained grass and gardens.

There is no listed fee but a donation box is beside the service point and “garçon” arrives on his bike late afternoon to collect the donations.



After lunch, we took off on the bikes through the small village where nothing seemed to be open and then followed the bike trail along the Hungarian border to the village of Pama about 10kms away.

We passed by a trail called "the iron curtain trail" but kept to the Austrian side today.

Our German neighbours in the Stellplatz were taking this trail to Bratislava which was a round trip of about 60kms so expect we wouldn't see them until early evening.

Saw a Gasthof with cars and bikes outside so ventured in where there was a group celebrating a 60th birthday.

A band started arriving half an hour later to set up but we left well before the music began.

Such wonderfully traditional little pubs here with Austrian artefacts gracing each spare spot on the walls.

Thoroughly enjoyed the ride past other little communities with only vineyards and crops for most of the way.

Sat and enjoyed the peaceful surroundings for the rest of the day and watched horses and bikes pass by.

The trees and gardens are home to so many different birds who sang happily throughout the afternoon - even saw a rabbit scurrying across the field below.

### **Tuesday 22nd May**

We are back in the country of wind turbines and one area we passed through today had hundreds for as far as you could see.

### **Bad Deutsch, Altenburg – Austria**

**Our campsite for tonight: Parking Donaupromenade, Bad Deutsch, Altenburg - GPS 48.140739. 16.900530**

This is a huge gratis parking area right on the Danube.

We had travelled through several villages and towns along the Danube last year (though not this town) so watching the river cruise boats and dredges brought back memories.

The river flows very fast and some vessels found it hard beating against the tide.

There is a huge park adjacent to the campsite that goes forever along the Danube but bikes were not permitted here (pedestrian access only) so decided to walk through the beautiful park and into the small town.

Not a huge amount of activity whilst we strolled through.

Lots of locals come to the river to sit and enjoy the view but all were well behaved.

Adjacent is a boat slipping area for small boats where there were about five sets of rails that took the smaller boats down to the River.

We had tried to visit the tourist bureau but like so many places here, they were only open for a few hours in the morning with a two to three hour break in the middle of the day and then open again for a couple of hours mid to late afternoon.

Watched the lights of the cruise boats float by until late in the evening.

Like all cruise ships, they sightsee during the day and travel at night.

### **Wednesday 23rd May**

Only a few short kms away, we found this little gem, again with a Danube riverfront location.

### **Hainburg an der Donau – Austria**

**Our campsite for tonight: Hainburg an der Donau - GPS 48.150900 N 16.944400 E**

Within a few minutes walk, we were in the heart of town and on the way saw many buildings of many years gone by with stone water towers, arched stone bridges and a fortress wall surrounding this quaint little town.

Passed a shopping centre with all the larger shops you could wish for and lots of smaller shops in the heart including an ice cream parlour (had to do as the locals do - taste the lemon and mango combination -yum!).

This area is part of a national park with lots of caves and a castle to explore.

There are walking and bike trails everywhere and it is great to see people using them.

I am sure that the Europeans were born on bikes and riding is such a natural way of life here.

We watched many groups of teenagers (high school age) go on canoe adventures starting from the little cove in front of us, down stream only as there would be no possibility to paddle against this tide.

Once they hit the main river it took them miles away in only a short time - what a buzz!

Finished another great day with dinner in the local Heuriger.

Enjoyed a really great local Chardonnay and a shared mixed plate of local wursts, cheeses, pickled vegetables and some of the best tasting bread (the Europeans really know how to make it).

Good to see my driver become more adventurous with trying some of these local foods.

### **Thursday 24th May**

We are heading into new territory for us in Northern Austria now and leaving the Danube behind.

Three out of every four places we pass by end in "dorf" meaning "village" and each has its own special characteristics.

We love these places off the beaten track and are keen to spend time here and explore as many as possible.

### Wilfersdorf – Austria

**Our campsite for tonight: Schloss Wilfersdorf, Wilfersdorf - GPS 48.585999 N 16.645140 E**

This is just the smallest village where we are parked in the grounds of this castle, Liechtenstein Schloss.

Very different from the ones we have seen perched high on hills with the only way up on the back of a mountain goat!

This is a low set two storey building set on huge level grounds.

Check in is at the castle desk where a small fee of €4 is requested and all services are included.

They are just so lovely here and provide tourist maps of numerous walks and bike trails and nothing is a problem.

Only three Mohos are permitted and we were lucky enough to be number two - though by the end of the evening we managed to squeeze four in.

Here there are four villages within a few kms of each other including Bullendorf, Hobersdorf and a little further to Ebersdorf an Der Zaya.

The walking and bike trails through these villages are only a few kms apart so not a huge effort on day one to visit these.

With thunder and lightning on the horizon, we headed back quickly, eager to try part of the longer Liechtenstein Trail tomorrow.

This trail covers around 60kms each way ending in the Czech Republic but we have plans to do only a small part of it tomorrow.

Dropped in at the local pub just in time for dinner (goulash and a half pint to wash it down with - yum!).

Our friends at the next table kept us entertained during the evening while a very large St Bernhard and its owner sat at another table - man's best friend is not limited to where they can go and dinner in a restaurant is no exception.

### **Friday 25th May**

Poured with rain all night and all hopes of a bike ride were dashed right up until mid morning.

Made a few phone calls home, did some research and writing and waited for the weather to clear - not today it seems.

Made a decision to move on by early afternoon and our planned route was closed for road works so the deviation took us to the Czech border.

Didn't want to go there today so promptly turned around and backtracked a few kms and found an alternate road leading to our planned destination.

Rain had eased leaving the valleys so green and fresh looking and driving through these back blocks now took us through so many beautiful places.

I am sure the locals have never seen a Moho with Australian stickers before and each person we talk to is amazed we have travelled so far.

Their reaction is always the same - big smiles, eyebrows raised and then the words "Australia - so far away".

Arrived at the Thayatal National Park Campsite to find it a little more than overgrown and needing lots of tender loving care to be ready for the summer vacation period.

The forest itself was wonderful, with walking and biking trails everywhere and kids play areas and a restaurant ready to take hundreds a day - but not today!

Drove on a little further to Austria's smallest town - Hardegg.

It has its own fairytale castle set high atop of a rock overlooking the Thayal River which is the official border between Austria and Czech.

Really lovely little town and worth a visit.

The river front areas were set up as a great picnic area and especially inviting with lovely trees and gardens and of course a couple of restaurants.

Decided not to stay in the national park Stellplatz so moved on 30kms or so.

### [Eggenburg – Austria](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Eggenburg Stellplatz - GPS 48.645600N 15.817200E**

The local shire has provided three similar motorhome dedicated campsites along this small stretch - Ratz, Pulkau and Eggenburg.

All are in close proximity to the centre of town but the best in our opinion is Eggenburg which is set in a quiet location with lovely trees and grassed areas surrounding it.

It is a self check in where you fill in a card, put your 4€ in an envelope and place it in a box at the building at the entry to the car park.

Maps and tourist information is provided so no need to look for the sometimes illusive tourist bureau.

Spent the evening enjoying the surroundings with only one other motorhome and the birds to share it with.

### **Saturday 26th May**

Took off after breakfast up and over the hill and spent four hours in town.

Today was market and artistic skills day, so we watched all sorts of activities including potters in action, glass blowing, wood turning etc etc.

In the market square, we saw two young girls sitting in a bath enjoying an authentic mud bath.

St Stephans church was a real delight and whilst there, we watched a christening - just so beautiful with guitarist and female soloist adding something special to the event.

The town is surrounded by a fortress wall and the old buildings in the central town square have been restored magnificently.

Had planned to stay another night but the festivities concluded at lunchtime and once all the stalls packed down, very few people remained.

What was the height of activity only hours before now turned into almost a ghost town.

Time to move on again.

### **Saturday 26th May 2018**

Every day of travel just brings more beautiful scenery and wonderful little villages.

It is not difficult to keep harping on about it and at times, find it difficult to say more than has already been said so many times before.

The colours of spring flowers and the green rolling hills continue on forever.

### **Horn – Austria**

### **Our campsite for tonight: Festgelände Horn, Horn - GPS 48.672249N 15.6607760E**

Arrived on what appeared to be the beginning of a festival so after a short half hour walk we came across some entertainers on stilts, singing and playing some very interesting instruments.

Lots of young families enjoying the entertainment.

Thought we were in for a real treat in town but soon found there was nothing else happening.

There is a castle in town but not open for public viewing, however the park surrounding it was just beautiful so enjoyed the stroll through.

Temperatures are mid to high twenties during the day now so the walks are becoming restricted to early or later in the afternoons.

Liquid refreshments of course a necessity often and dieting is out of the question until we come home.

The campsite itself is set in a large greenfield which is also used for festivals as the name suggests and has a soccer field at the other end.

Locals walk their dogs, grandmas walk their grandkids - it is really lovely and cool with large shady trees.

Being a Stellplatz it offers services on a user pay basis with a small camping fee - though could not find anywhere to pay this.

### **Sunday, Monday & Tuesday 27th - 29th May**

We travelled through the mountainside today where the forests of massive pine trees bordered the road km after km.

In the middle of nowhere, we stumbled across a field where a museum of stick objects made out of metal was on display for a short time as part of an upcoming festival.

Literally hundreds of them some being a couple of metres tall.

Abstract versions of everything possible including animals, people, trees, machines etc.

A few kms further on we came across the biggest flea market you have ever seen - right in the middle of a forest.

There were cars parked on both sides of the street for miles.

We found this very strange as it was nowhere near any village or town.

### [Waldhausen im Strudengau – Austria](#)

**Our campsite for three nights: Badesee, Waldhausen im Strudengau – GPS 48.284199N 14.958830E**

Another gem in the middle of nowhere and certainly highly recommended.

It is set amidst farm land with sheep grazing only a few metres away.

A huge lake is only a few steps away where locals swam and the younger set played beach volleyball on the sand court beside the lake.

The local community has provided this area for its locals and allow about 7 Mohos to enjoy for a donation of 3€ per day.

We spent three beautiful days here where we did the various nature walks through the surrounding hills.

Two are only short walks of about an hour each but the third was a real challenge taking over 4 hours over 13kms.

The trails are generally well marked but had to toss a coin a few times - left or right?

Most times we guessed well but we did manage to get lost once but were rescued with the help of our Pocket Earth App on the Iphone.

The walks to the village take you through the countryside with stately Austrian homes and gardens along the way.

The small village is just delightful and the Waldhausen Abbey we rate among the best we have seen on our entire trip.

The outside is deceiving but once you enter you are gob smacked.

The high vaulted ceilings are white stucco decorated with frescos.

So light bright and airy compared to many of the darker rich timbered interiors of most cathedrals.

The inside is predominately white black and gold and is more than stunning.

### **Wednesday & Thursday 30th - 31st May**

Stopped at a couple of potential spots along the way but having being spoiled by Waldhausen, found it difficult to find one that was appealing.

We have headed back to the Danube again as we are keen to hit the bike trails.

### **Our campsite for two nights: Stellplatz Schach, Aschach am Der Donau - GPS 48.374130N 14.028160E**

Found the wanted spot here with only 4 spots set right on the river.

It is a Stellplatz and as expected, the camping spots are more expensive for the privilege of being next to the river.

The last day of May - Corpus Christie - is celebrated here.

The locals dress up in traditional costume and celebrations take to the river where two boats - one decorated with trees and coloured flags take the dignitaries for a short cruise along the river and the other taking the Austrian band in full costume behind it.

Not sure but think it is a public holiday as the river front was alive with spectators.

The river boardwalk is lined with outside restaurants all separated with a metre high hedge - about 15 in all, providing a large selection of eats and drinks.

Very cool, green and inviting, these restaurants were packed with spectators.

Headed off on the bikes along the Donau trail.

You can go forever along these trails and today, they were totally crowded with bikers.

We were of course the slowest on the trail (the navigator holding up the driver) but we were not trying to win any race but merely out to enjoy the view and the day.

Have learnt to ride more confidently on the roads now but was a little less confident when the two lane road ended up being one lane wide only.

A bit daunting when you know there is a car behind you and no room to pass until you find a spot to move over.

Fortunately the drivers here have lived with the bikes all their lives and are very patient.

Thoroughly enjoyed the few hours riding and rewarded ourselves with a great Danube lunch before heading home and passing out for the rest of the day.

### **Germany**

### **Friday 1st June**

Our first camp selection was closed 🚫 as the Gasthaus had had a serious fire and was cordoned off.

Took another hour and another border crossing to our next stop.

Straight through the border with only a sign to indicate we were back in Germany - no vignettes in Germany which is a treat.

### Bischofswiesen – Germany

**Our campsite for tonight: Gotschenalm, Bischofswiesen - GPS 47.648312N 12.936930E**

Plan was to find a place close enough to visit The Eagles Nest - Hitlers Summer House.

A great location right next to the ski lifts and a restaurant.

The views across and down the valley were fabulous but we were in need of water so spent only one night here.

There are no services here except the use of the restaurant and the WC.

The chairs from the ski lift had been taken down and were neatly stacked in the carpark ready to reassemble for the winter months.

Brought back memories 🤔 of our skiing days at Saalbach, Hinterglemm, Hopfgarten, Soll, and Obertauern as we looked at the big trail maps and talked for hours about past ski trips.

Such wonderful memories.

Not a great day weather wise with light drizzle and a storm threatening so bunkered down until dinner time.

There is a €10 cost plus local mountain tax of €2.60 each to stay here but you do get a voucher for €10 to spend in the restaurant within 24 hours.

The driver had an upset tummy but still we ate what was a fabulous meal on the deck overlooking the ski runs.

### **Saturday - Wednesday - 2nd - 6th June**

Set off early next morning with my driver still unwell. 🤔

### Oberau – Germany

**Our campsite for several nights: Reisemobilplatz Rasp, Oberau - GPS 47.651711N. 13.070550E**

Another highly recommended spot for those wanting to visit the Eagles Nest.

The Stellplatz is high up in the mountains, again with a fabulous mountain and valley view - it has all the services and we quickly filled the water tanks and then spent the next few days waiting for the weather to clear enough to visit the Eagles Nest.

Met some Swedish Australians (Gunnar and Anna) who were eager to engage in lots of conversation.

So interesting to hear their story - they live permanently in two motorhomes - one in Sydney and another which is Swedish registered but they leave in storage in Spain whilst they are in Australia.



They spend six months in Australia and six months in Europe with much of their overseas travel spent in Germany – one of their favourite countries.

They have many more Aussie stickers, kangaroos, harbour bridges etc then we have which made us feel a little inadequate, Aussie wise.

Took a few days for the upset tummy to clear (not sure what he ate or drank to cause this) but with the weather predicting lots of storms and bad weather over the coming days, we took advantage of a reasonable day to head off to the Eagles Nest.

### Eagle's Nest – Obersaltsburg – Germany

Drove Ziggy to the carpark in Obersaltsburg only about 5kms away and then booked the ticket for the buses to take us up to the Eagles Nest.

They run every 25 minutes and cost around €33 for the two of us return and cover entry to the Eagles Nest.

One cannot go up by car to the top but the very fit can walk it - not for these two little old ducks!

The scenery was more than spectacular as we climbed higher and higher until we were way above the clouds.

Think this must be the top of the world, you could see forever in all directions.

On arrival at the entrance, we headed into a foot tunnel through the mountain (so cold) to an amphitheatre where a lift took us for a 42 second ride to the top.

Another tick in the "bucket list" box 📋 as we explored the Eagles Nest which is now predominately a massive indoor and outdoor restaurant with a few rooms still in their original state.

Given it is still not peak season, it was really crowded with people looking like ants scattered in and around the house and hillside adjoining.

Enjoyed a great lunch on the deck overlooking the world!

Headed back to Oberau for the night.

### Thursday - Sunday 7th - 10th June

From a tree change to a lake change as we headed for the Chiemsee which is one of the largest lakes in the district.

### Our campsite for several nights: Wohnmobilstellplatz Bernau am Chiemsee

It is a new mobile home park that takes around 25 mobile homes only with no caravans or tents allowed.

Only 6€ for 24 hours and all services provided with a small cost for showers.

No internet unfortunately and don't need electricity as the solar panels work exceptionally well and fully top up the batteries each day.

Such an excellent location only metres away from the lake where there are sailing boats, paddle boats, and everything that floats on water available for rental.

Even have a ferry that does half and full day trips around the lake - it is huge.

Spent 4 fabulous hot days here just relaxing, reading and taking off on the bikes and exploring for a good part of each day.

The bike trails go forever and the only thing that brings us back is a large thirst and the need to mingle with the locals.

Both were satisfied at one or more of lakefront bars and restaurants.

Have felt like being in the tropics over the last couple of weeks as about 4pm everyday the dark clouds come over the mountains followed by thunder and then torrential rain and then back to sunshine - very odd but very refreshing.

We believe we are experiencing a very early summer already.

The camp ground has filled up every night with many mobiles turned away to find somewhere else to park.

Don't think we will be "alone" again and soon will be fighting for a spot ourselves.

Strange also are the number of four footed residents - 90% of Mohos have at least one and most at least 2 or more - all shapes and sizes.

Just beautiful to see how they are worshipped here and are taken to dinner in restaurants and even climb aboard buses for sightseeing tours with their owners.

The record for dogs in a motorhome was 5 at Bingen am Rhein. 🐕

### **Monday 11th June**

Needed to get some spare parts for the window struts for Ziggy so this place was highly recommended by Gunnar and Anna.

### **[Sulzemoos \(near Munich\) - Germany](#)**

**Our campsite for tonight: Der Freistaat, Sulzemoos (near Munich) - GPS 48.281799N 11.261300E**

Certainly not tree or sea change but basic parking area for Mohos and caravans for up to three nights gratis - has services for small change.

This place is huge and has a sales showroom and shop with every conceivable thing you could wish for to deck out your new moho and spare parts.

Service areas for several Moho brands including Hymer.

The staff in the shop and service areas were absolutely fabulous and so helpful and spoke excellent English.

The service department provided us with two new struts for both the large windows which were becoming increasingly difficult to stay open on their hinges.

Took about 15 minutes for us to replace both.

Stayed here for the night amongst a full car park of Mohos and again the tropical storm came in right on cue at 4pm.

Highly recommended as a stopover to replace parts and service - this place is massive.

### **Tuesday - Thursday, 12th- 14th June**

#### **Munich – Germany**

#### **Our campsite for three nights: Allianz Arena, Munich - GPS 48.221851N 11.624720E**

We had such a great time in Munich during a previous trip, decided to come back again.

What a magic football stadium - the outer circular walls looking like a huge mass of bubbles and at night lit up a spectacular red.

Buses come and go all day bringing in eager football fans to do a tour of the stadium.

Great separate facility for motorhomes and each day fully packed out by late evening.

Rained the day we arrived and continued on all day and well into the next day so took advantage of the great wifi and waited for the weather to clear.

Did a walk around this great stadium but got a drenching so headed back to dry off.

Set off early next morning to the UBarn station located on the other side of the stadium.

Only a 15 minute brisk walk around the stadium or shorter if you cut through the stadium (only possible during opening hours).

Picked up a Tage ticket (day ticket) for around €12.60 for both of us which gave us free travel on several types of transport until 6am following morning.

Took the U6 line and 11 short stops later arrived at Marienplatz - right in the heart of Old Town Square.

The square was abuzz with tourists and there was a queue at the tourist office there to pick up info on things to see and do.

Started with the Glockenspiel (or Carillon which it is now called) in the tower of the New Town Hall which attracted a square jam packed with spectators at 11am, 12 noon and 5pm.

The New Gothic Style Town Hall built during 1867-1909 is the most spectacular and is only one amongst so many wonderful structures around the square - Marienplatz rates highly in our top ten squares in Europe.

Spent six hours walking the streets - there are so many stunning churches in this part of the world and we thoroughly enjoyed going through the Frauenkirche Cathedral, St Peters Church (stunning interior), St Michaels Church and the Theatiner Church.

Most of the streets in centre of the Old Town are designated Pedestrian only areas making it easy to get around trouble free - literally hundreds of shops line these streets.

The two separate entrance Gates to the Old City built in the 14th century - Karistor and Isartor are decorated with colourful frescos and are imposing entrances to a magic Old Town.

So many more places that we visited that should be mentioned but are not as there is not enough room to mention them all.

Could not resist a litre or two of beer and a Weiner Schnitzel at the Hofbrauhaus - a real icon and a must do while in Munich.

The traditional Bavarian band set the scene as waiters dressed in lederhosen and serving maids dressed in traditional German gear served stein after stein of beer (sometimes three steins in each hand) to the hundreds in the beer hall - what a hoot!

We ate lunch here in 1978 and it is still just as impressive, even though a tad expensive.

The Viktualienmarkt just outside the Old City was a diners delight with street after street offering everything and anything you could want to eat with table and chairs in outside areas set up under shady trees.

The location of the campsite and its proximity to the UBarn made the visit to Munich so easy.

### **Friday - Saturday, 15-16th June**

### **[Gunzburg – Germany](#)**

### **Our campsite for two nights: Waldbad, Gunzburg - GPS 48.462791N 10.269360E**

This is basically a swimming and water park set in acres of forest trees with large expanses of lush green lawn where people lie in the sun after swimming or enjoying the water slides.

Beach volleyball courts and areas large enough to kick a football are also within this park.

Bit cold for us to swim in but lots of the moho people here took advantage.

The community has set up this beautiful little spot for several Mohos where there is only a wire fence between us and the Waldbad - such a serene view and so very quiet given the water activities which are quite a way in the distance.

Gunsburg is only a ten minute walk from the campsite, and also a bike path runs by the campsite and leads into the Old Town which is quite hilly in the town area itself.

Had to leave the bikes at the entry to the Mall which is "Pedestrian Only area" and enjoyed the short but beautiful Main Street here - again dotted with restaurants where the locals filled the tables.

Walked the bikes until out of the hilly village and took a path running along the Danube which was not as pretty and mostly gravel so gave up after about an hour and returned back to our lovely setting in the forest.

Many of the bikini clad maidens stayed until the sun went down.

The driver commented on the wonderful eye candy - bet he was not the only one.

Had two great nights enjoying an outside BBQ using our Cadac, which has been fabulous to use.

The sun does not disappear until around 9pm here so there is lots of outside time to be enjoyed sipping wine, eating and listening to our iPod music.

The salmon was super delicious - that is something coming from this navigator who is not a real lover of fish.

Wrapped in alfoil, coated with a light oil, onion rings and tomato slices and gently cooked and turned for several minutes - yummy!

This place is very popular and was full by early afternoon with extra Mohos parked outside the gates overnight.

### **Sunday 17th June**

The roads and auto barns are super and we pass by those continuing rolling green hills and farm land.

It makes every day seem like a trip into the country where you end up feeling on top of the world and refreshed.

### **Riedlingen – Germany**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Stadhalle, Riedlingen - GPS 48.151699N 9.478080E**

This is just a gratis parking area but right beside the Danube again (smaller tributary though) where there is a bike path again to explore.

Saw lots of people coming from a particular direction so thought it might be markets.

We walked right bang smack into the annual Fish Festival where the Schwabische Altback Musikanten band of 10 or so horn players entertained the crowd while cooks treated the crowd to meals of fresh trout and Zander fillets (was a fish festival after all).

When in Rome - so again this non fish loving navigator had to try the Zander - highly recommended by my driver.

Was delicious with the German made potato salad adding the extras.

Sat with a lovely family of three and engaged in a total German conversation.

Here in Germany we rarely come across someone who does not speak English.

Most that do speak English want to practice their English on us so we speak German and they speak English - very amusing but it is what makes our trip so worthwhile - the people.

In this area (Baden Wurttemberg) many people speak Schwabisch which is a special German dialect which other German speakers may not necessarily understand.

Waddled out after a couple of beers and lunch into the Old Town which is a short walk across a small bridge.

With each corner we came across another set of delightfully restored three storey Bavarian style buildings.

Being Sunday not a lot was open except of course restaurants and ice cream parlours - everyone was enjoying these sweet treats but lunch left us too full to even contemplate one.

Back to Ziggy where we chatted with our German neighbour - an old man travelling alone after losing his wife a few years back.

Loves the travel and meeting people.

Said it was his only option now since losing his wife - how sad for him but he said - better to travel than to just sit and wait for his time to go.

Only had room for a glass of wine before lights out and slept like a baby.

### **Monday 18th June - Germany**

#### **Geisinger – Germany**

**Our campsite for tonight: Reisemobilstellplatz, Geisinger - GPS 47.919868N . 8.649630E**

Have not written bullet points for our blog for a few days, so the memory of some of the next few entries may be a little shorter than normal.

We try to do bullet points at the end of each day and find if we don't, then we have to rely on memory which these days, given the amount we see each day is not reliable.

This campsite is really well laid out with lots of space and grassed areas separating every two pitches.

Lots of greenery and trees which gave it a very lush relaxed feel.

Explored this small village in no time at all - not a lot of photo opportunities but a really great overnight spot.

### **Tuesday 19th June**

Made a special happy birthday call to my little brother Mike before heading off on the bikes to explore the many villages in the area - happy Birthday little bro! - judging by the cake on Facebook - well celebrated.

Bikeways here were fabulous and saw lots in the couple of hours while passing through a few smaller villages.

Quite a few car dealer places along the way where there were cars with camouflaged paint jobs and fake body parts - new test vehicles my driver tells me, were in a number of car yards so had to stop to check them out.

No badging on these so you could not make out the car type but suspected they were Mercedes, BMW and Audi.

Left the campsite after lunch expecting an hour's drive to our next destination.

Partial highway closures caused gridlock on the highway directing all traffic (including massive trucks) through a town.

Several roads converged into one intersection where the traffic lights caused pandemonium.

### Freiburg Im Breisgau – Germany

**Our campsite for tonight: Stellplatz Freiburg Im Breisgau, Freiburg - GPS 47.999779N 7.825700E**

Four hours later we arrived, very hot under the collar and frustrated.

This is an old Stellplatz but its walking proximity to Freiburg - around 20 minutes to Old Town, made it worthwhile.

Not many places left by the time we arrived so unfortunately we had a choice of only a couple of very hot and sunny spots.

### **Wednesday 20th June**

Straight into Old Town first thing after breakfast - beautiful shaded tree lined streets made the walk pleasurable with an amazing school on the way for lots of photos.

Obviously a church school with two massive spires featuring coloured mosaic tiles.

This town is a bikers Mecca with its cycling infrastructure boasted as being unequalled anywhere else in Germany.

We passed by a bicycle parking station -three levels high with a restaurant on the top floor.

In the City, Bicycles were parked everywhere at any post available - literally thousands of them and where normally you would need to look out for cars, here in the city, cyclists are the major hazard.

The Old town's feature is the cathedral - Freiburg Minster - building of the Blessed Virgin - with its main tower 116 metres high.

What a wonderful structure taking up a whole block with a large square all the way around it.

Market stalls selling fresh fruit, deli items, food and of course souvenirs took up every spare spot in the square.

Unfortunately the cathedral was closed for several hours with a special mass being held inside.

Really worth the few hours we spent here going down the many small cobbled streets where leather shops in particular are a feature with so many beautiful bags and shoes to choose from.

Left the campsite in the late afternoon as we did not want to stay in our hot spot for the rest of the day – it was around 30 degrees in the shade.

### Meissenheim – Germany

**Our campsite for tonight: Wohnmobilpark Ortenau, Meissenheim - GPS 48.416000N 7.777390E**

Another well laid out small Stellplatz in a small town.



Lots of greenery and trees which we welcomed and soon found a shady spot to settle in.

This is a popular spot and soon all spaces in the main section were taken up.

There is an additional overflow area which is just beautiful with a feature being a large communal fire pit and lots of interesting artefacts scattered around.

No shade though and would be a great winter spot.

Bike trails lead out from the back of the Stellplatz linking up to bike trail down the Rhine bikeways - not today though as it was too hot with no breeze at all.

This town has the most amazing modern looking Rathaus (town hall) we have ever seen.

Most town halls are in historic or old buildings but this one was right out there.

A pretty little town but not a lot to do apart from the bike ride.

### **Thursday 21st June**

Still hot today so opted to move on without bike ride.

### **Schiltach – Germany**

### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking Lehwiese, Schiltach - GPS 48.290871N 8.343960E**

This village was highly recommended by our campsite friends (Gunnar and Anna) we met at the campsite near the Eagles Nest.

Rated as one of the top ten most beautiful villages in Germany, this village was truly so picturesque.

The campsite is gratis and mostly taken up with local cars so arrive by 8am or after 6pm.

A tight entry point into the parking area but really worthwhile as it is set in a beautiful grassed area bordering a crystal clear shallow pebbled running stream.

Views from the car park look across to the Old Town which we couldn't wait to explore on foot (too hilly for bikes).

Only a short stroll across a beautiful old bridge where on both sides of the bridge, colourful flower boxes were in full bloom.

Through and along narrow cobbled streets where every three storey Bavarian home was built in the 17th century.

Every home featured brightly coloured window frames with contrasting window shutters - greens, blues, yellows, reds - every conceivable colour.

The stream ran through the middle of Old Town, again with quaint little pedestrian bridges with the flower boxes.

Everything is so well kept and clean and pretty.



It is difficult to describe how picturesque this village is - but should be high on the list to visit.

### **Friday 22nd June, Saturday 23rd June, Sunday 24th June**

On the bucket list was a visit to Stuttgart to visit the Porsche Museum.

Found an ideal spot in Park 4 Night only a short walk away but the five spots there were already taken by cars.

This whole area is a motorhome nightmare with very few places to even turn around, let alone park.

We stopped in frustration and phoned Porsche directly.

Normally you have to phone ahead or go online to book a place in the Moho area.

We received directions on the phone to this area which is chained and with a password number to enter.

The street name we were given took us down a one way single lane road beside a railway line.

On one side, cars were parked nose to tail the whole way leaving just enough room for one car to get by.

The bad news was that there was a half metre drop off on the opposite side beside the railway line.

We couldn't turn around so had an extremely nervous ride where we were only cms between the parked cars on one side and the half metre drop on the other side.

Got to the end with no sign of the chained fence we needed.

Asked a few people who really didn't help much so no tick in the box for this bucket list item.

Not sure where we went wrong but the scary drive was enough to make us move on. Didn't go back the same way!!!

The Driver phoned the Porsche Sales Department and cancelled his order for the 911 Carrera Turbot 🚗

Very impressive buildings as we drove by and took a couple of photos. - hundreds of people everywhere and traffic was at a standstill even in the middle of a working day.

Ended up being a very long drive today so were extremely happy to find a place and settle down for a while.

### **Germersheim – Germany**

**Our campsite for three nights: An Der Carnot'schen Mauer, Germersheim - GPS 49.219959N 8.377730E**

Had three wonderful relaxing days here in this super little town.

The campsite is about five minutes walk to town in one direction and the same to the mighty Rhine river in the other.

Very pretty spot with great big beautiful shady trees and a credit to this town for supplying such a great place.

Visited the tourist office first thing and armed with maps headed into town.

This old garrison town is surrounded by a fortified wall with two impressive moated entry structures on two sides of the town.

It has its own military jail, garrison hospital and commandant's headquarters still standing but now used for many other purposes.

Not a very large central town area but some beautiful parks.

This area is famous for several bike ways, the most picturesque is the Veloroute which runs for 110 Kms with much of it along the Rhine.

The most scenic is the stretch from this town south to Worth.

Our longest bike ride took us from Germersheim to Leimersheim - a return distance of about 30kms.

We took a wrong turn which added a few extra kms to the ride.

Rewarded ourselves with a long stop at a small restaurant on the Rhine near the Ziegelei Museum where the Navigator was introduced to a Radler - like our shandy in a bottle.

Just what the doctor ordered - may never have a straight beer again 😊

Did several rides over these days each time finishing with the 10 km ride back to this restaurant where you could sit and watch the boats go by.

Sunday was festival day where the local African people set up a stage on the waterfront and entertained the crowd with some of their local music and dancing.

Quite a large contingent of Africans here.

Highly recommended for cyclists (even the less experienced like the navigator).

### **Monday 25th & Tuesday 26th June**

Happy birthday Chris. Good to see you have a great friend in to create a feast for a King (and queen) on your special day.

Hi Eli - my you are growing up so quickly and talking so well now.

Did not travel very far today and after leaving the Black Forest and all its beautiful scenery we are now bordering the Pfälzer Forest which is renowned for its vineyards.

There are tons of Weingut's (vineyards) to choose from to stay and it was difficult making a final choice.

### **Burrweiler – Germany**

**Our campsite for two nights: Wenget Eberle, Burrweiler - GPS 49.246712N 8.080760E**

This site only has three spots but the area set aside for Mohos includes tables and chairs in a beautiful fruit tree garden setting overlooking acres and acres of vineyards and little villages dotted everywhere in the distance.

The village a short walk away is very small but quaint and has only a couple of small shops.

Think Monday is their "ruhig day" (closed rest day) as we did not sight a person anywhere.

The family here were very helpful and just lovely.

Electricity is included in the small cost (though we do not use it as our solar panels more than fill our batteries without it each day).

No other services except Internet which is super fast and a real bonus for the Driver.

I become an Internet widow when on the odd occasion we get a good internet service.

Ziggy is happy again as she had a super spring clean on the inside.

Fortunately she is really only one room - but a very well used room.

Lots of reading, internet and taking in the magic scenery for most of the two very relaxing days.

### **Wednesday 27th - Saturday 30th June**

#### **[Stelzenberg \(near Kaiserslautern\) - Germany](#)**

#### **Our home for four wonderful days and nights: Stelzenberg with Martina and Ralf**

Caught up with Martina and Ralf in their lovely home.

It was only a few weeks ago in Croatia where we shared some great places and experiences together yet it seemed like a lifetime ago.

We had so much to catch up on so we rambled on about our adventures for the whole day and late into the night.

Met their lovely friends Petra and Walter that evening and enjoyed a wonderful BBQ "German Style" on the back deck.

It is summer here now so it is still light well after 10 pm.

The schnapps came out at the end and it was evident no one wanted to go to bed.

Ziggy was parked on a pad at the front of the house so did not have far to stagger home.

Did so many things and saw so much of this lovely part of Germany over the four days.

No driving for my driver as Martina expertly drove us from village to village and my driver became a passive passenger!

First off to the Schlossberg Caves in Homburg.

Originally in the 17th century the sand extracted from here was used to make glass.

During World War II the caves served as protection against bombing raids.

They have recently been extensively reconstructed and now are a tourist attraction where some of the caverns are just amazing and accentuated by colourful lighting.

Sitting high on the hill and on top of the caves are the remains of the ruins of the Fortress of Homburg built in the late 16th century during the Renaissance era.

Our turn to cook dinner tonight so the Tennis Club in Kaiserslautern was the venue where Petra joined the four of us.

There was a tennis camp on so we sat and watched the future tennis champs in action.

Had the best and biggest Parmy ever and needed both Ralf and my driver to help me out to finish it.

After brekky on went the walking shoes and we headed to the forest which backs on to their home for a leisurely four hour walk through the Pfälzer Forest to Trippstadt.

The walking track is well used by the locals and even though it was a work day, we passed many walkers.

It was so breathtakingly beautiful with the track taking us through huge forests and by and over clear mountain streams.

Surprisingly did not see any fauna except for a few frogs croaking away in the streams.

Stopped three quarters of the way in this 13+ mile hike at a camping ground for coffee and cake and didn't realise until we resumed our hike, how far we had come and how much further we needed to go.

An amazing walk, the longest by far I think we have made so far.

Think we were all tired at the end of it.

Big day on the road next day where we visited the very touristy village of St Martin.

A must visit village - one of those magic little places where everything is a picture worth capturing.

It is set amongst vineyards for as far as you can see and every second place is a Weingut offering wine tasting and/or accommodation and meals or both.

Stopped in at the Consulat des Weins for wine tasting.

Highly recommended by Ralf and Martina as being one of the better Weingut's in the area.

Beautifully set out with as many wines as you wanted to taste.

Just take a glass and help yourself to whatever you wanted. mmmm??? one could get quite plastered if not careful.

Tried a couple of really delicious wines - sparkling for Martina and myself while Rob savoured the still whites.

Onward through a number of quaint villages to Bad Durkheim where we were shown the worlds largest wine barrel which is in fact a restaurant with no windows.

Finished this wonderful day at Weisenheim am Berg in a trendy restaurant named Solo.

The entry doors leading into the courtyard are large enough to fit the front of a castle and once past these you enter the courtyard which has a poolside setting in the middle of a lush green garden.

Bean bags are everywhere and every place setting around the pool is different.

No two tables are the same - guests were sitting around the pool on bean bags sipping their coffees and dangling their feet in the cool water.

The place was packed but we were lucky enough to get the best seat in the house as it was vacated just as we arrived.

Thank you so much Ralf and Martina for sharing your home, your friends and your family with us and for the special friendship we have shared and hope we can continue when you visit us in Australia.

### **Sunday 1st July**

#### **[Mettlach – Germany](#)**

**Our campsite for tonight: Mettlacher Abtei-Brau, Mettlach - GPS 49.498161N 6.596750E**

Small uninteresting but well situated Stellplatz in the carpark for the Abtei- Brau (brewery) - right on the outskirts of Mettlach with only a few minutes walk to the centre where there are numerous factory outlet shops - very pretty Main Street with outdoor restaurants on both sides.

The walk into town passes by the former Benedictine abbey which is now the Head Office of Villeroy & Boch.

A massive park sits behind the building where there is an interesting 20 metre tree covered in foliage and shaped to a human figure with a bird's head.

### **Monday 2nd July and Tuesday 3rd July**

Took a 1.5 hour boat ride on the Saar River which took us through a Lock system and then past a wonderland of forest trees and around the famous Saar River Loop (Saarschleife) - a very important tourist attraction in this part of the country.

Very peaceful and enjoyable trip but 20 minutes x 2 was taken up going through the lock system twice so did not leave much time n the river.

There is a good view of “The Cloef” viewing platform from the boat.

Cool shady bikeways run along both sides of the river and would have been a better option.

Left the Stellplatz and headed a few kms to Orscholz where we ventured across the Treetop Walk Saarschleife - Cleof Atrium.

It is a 1250 m long wooden platform stretching high above the treetops and ending at the tower high on the hill.

A walk around the circular five storey boardwalk of the Cleof Atrium takes you to the top platform with the most unbelievable views of the river loop and the countryside in Germany, France and Luxembourg and mountains and villages in the distance - really worth the €10.

### Saarburg – Germany

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Reisemobilpark Saarburg - GPS 49.601131N 6.596750E**

Didn't realise until we arrived here that we visited this village last October.

The Stellplatz is one of the better ones with really wide pitches and some bordering the river under shady trees - you have to get in early to get one of these and I think you can book ahead.

It is about a 2km walk along the river to one of the prettiest villages we have stayed in.

The walk along the river to town gives you a panoramic view of the Old Town cascading down the hill on the other side with row upon row of beautiful three storey Bavarian homes, a large cathedral, the Town Hall and the castle with the highest vantage point, providing a stunning picture.

Across the bridge you follow the cobbled stone streets up into the centre where a thunderous cascading waterfall splits the Main Street.

Little bridges take you from one side to the other where each spare spot is taken up with outdoor restaurants.

Flower pots are full of coloured flowers which makes for stunning photos.

After lunch we walked back along the river took off the bikes and rode for the rest of the afternoon visiting quaint little villages along the way.

The bikeways here go forever on both sides of the river.

I am just so thrilled at being able to have this biking experience but again sad that I didn't learn to ride much earlier in life.

Hot and thirsty we returned and sat in the little garden at the Stellplatz where they offer drinks, cakes and coffee until around 6.30pm - really a great Stellplatz.

Took off on the bikes again straight after breakfast but in the opposite direction and on the other side of the river.

Heavy dark clouds appeared on the horizon so after stopping for coffee and cake at a small waterfront clubhouse peddled home in light rain - very refreshing.

### Luxembourg

#### **Wednesday 4th July**

The capital of Luxembourg is Luxembourg and the official languages are French, German and Luxembourgish and the currency is Euro.

Luxembourg has a population of around 600,000 people and a land mass of 2586 sq km.

Wild camping is prohibited in Luxembourg.

We passed into Luxembourg with no border gates to cross.

The countryside is lush and green with forests on both sides for miles.

Heading along the motorway we see bridges running across the motorway that are full of flora only and are specifically made to allow fauna to cross the freeway from one side to the other.

Road signs show stick pictures of deer bounding across the nature bridges.

Petrol is around 30 cents a litre cheaper than in Germany but have not stopped to restock groceries as yet - have heard they are also cheaper - yet to be confirmed.

### [Redange - Luxembourg](#)

**Our campsite for tonight: Parking Redange, Redange - GPS 49.769199N 5.894790E**

A small camper stop for about 10 Mohos set beside a wellness park.

Locals coming and going to use the indoor swimming pool during the afternoon and although there are heaps of car spots, they take the Mohos spots as well.

A very small village with not a huge amount to offer in interest apart from a large Cactus store - bit like Woolies at home.

Purchased a couple of new wine glasses - ours were too small and took numerous trips to the fridge to refill glasses 😊.

Rain clouds were brewing overhead so our walk was short lived and we scurried back to Ziggy as we had left the overhead hatches open.

Got back with only minutes to spare before the storm hit and continued on for several hours.

Great facilities all gratis including electricity but not a lot to see (we think as our walk was cut short).

### **Thursday 5th July**

### [Berdorf – Luxembourg](#)

**Our campsite for tonight: Camperplaats Martbusch, Berdorf - GPS 49.825958N 6.343800E**

Separate Moho area adjacent to a camping ground.

It is very well set up with huge pitches and grass and trees between each.

It is a beautiful clean modern village with new homes similar to ours at home - really pretty treed streets and lovely gardens.

This is the start of a large 110 km walk with many smaller walks and circuits in and around this village.

We ventured along the B2 5km nature walk through gorges and forests with sometimes not much more than shoulder width access down steep stoned steps through the gorges.

Stopped and watched several rock climbers ascending the steep flat vertical rocks - some more than 100 metres high - very scary to watch.

The forest walk was quite difficult with lots of steps both up and down but was just amazing with panorama views at different points across the valleys below.

A really great village to use as a base for these walks.

### **Friday 6th July**

Didn't get a chance to do any shopping in Luxembourg but I have been lead to believe that food - especially items like coffee are really cheap and lots of Germans cross the border to stock up on these items.

We visited the town of Echternach before crossing the border again into Germany.

Didn't stay overnight but found a great Moho day stop just outside of town GPS N49.809601 E6.42856.

About 6 places and from the look of those Mohos parked - they did stay overnight and even had awnings and deck chairs out! - sign clearly says no overnight parking.

Many hiking trails start from the town hall here and also lead through gorges and fantastic forests like we tackled yesterday.

The town itself is quoted as being the oldest town in Luxembourg and we sighted Roman excavations along the short walk into town.

Certainly the old neo Romanesque basilica and abbey (now converted to a tech school) were amazing.

The main square, though very small was bordered by restaurants and lots of picture opportunities for the great buildings around it.

On our return journey we heard music in the distance and like the Pied Piper traced the music to a park. "Skippy the Bush Kangaroo" followed by The Australian National Anthem was what we heard so we moved quickly.

Strange how out of place to hear our Aussie songs here and did leave a lump in the throat.

Reminded us of when we were staying with Ralf and Martina in Stelzenberg and their friends Petra and Walter gave us some gifts which included a jar of Aussie Vegemite, which apparently she ordered online, a crazy card and a copy of the Vegemite jingle – how good is that? –

Petra also had a playlist on her Iphone of Aussie songs – sure brings a tear to your eye when you have been away from home for so long –

Ralf and Martina are very fortunate to have such kind and thoughtful friends as Petra and Walter.



The park was alive with young people who were dressed in the traditional costumes of 8 different countries.

There was a competition on and judging took place on dance and costume.

We stayed a while and watched the end of the Australian group who were in shorts only, a bandana and of course some "not so good" aboriginal body paint.

They were doing aboriginal dance and finished off with hopping off on bouncing balls (a skippy impersonation).

They did get good points but they were not as good as the Russian Cossacks who followed them.

Had to leave as time was marching on and had to find a place to camp.

## Germany

We are back in Germany again and still think constantly about how lucky we have been to meet such wonderful people everywhere in our travels.

Starting way back in April last year with my family in Poland - Barbara, Piotr, Kornelia and Kamil who welcomed us into their home and hearts.

We enjoy writing to our new Polish family and our new European friends including Michael and Anne, Ralf and Martina, Marie-Louise and Robert, Michael and Pam, Debbie and Mike and Linda and David and thank you for making our journey so special. ❤️

Thank you also to our family and friends in Australia for keeping us up to date with local information and scuttlebutt. We do miss you all. ❤️

## Friday 6th and Saturday 7th July

Crossed the bridge at Echternach in Luxembourg and we were back in Germany again. We crossed borders between the two countries a couple of times as we moved towards our next destination.

## Ensch – Germany

### **Our campsite for two nights: Am Den Zwei Pappeln, Enschede - GPS N49.827332 E6.835630**

Back on the Mosel again, this campsite is set amongst vineyards and the Mosel.

Very shady with large nearly level pitches and lots of grass and shrubs in between.

Great biking here so took off through the vineyards and visited two small villages along the way before heading home.

Every man and his dog uses the bikeways and there is always people to meet and things to see along the way.

Directly opposite the campsite is the little village of Enschede which has a pedestrian and bike pass way to it that runs under the highway.

Everywhere we go, even though it is summertime, it is difficult to find people walking around the streets and most of these little villages look like ghost towns.

Only places you see people are in outdoor restaurants or on the bikeways.

There is a Hoffest (courtyard festival) advertised here for the weekend, so we are keen to join in the fun after dinner.

This is only a very small village with only a little shop but the campsite is peaceful and quiet and just a great place to relax, read, bike ride and talk with the locals.

The Hoffest was a hoot with all the locals here (about 80) as well as many from the campsite.

Only about five tents with long trestle tables and bench seats (beautifully decorated with flowers) which made for great communication.

The bar of course being the most popular with the food stall selling wursts and other German delicacies for dinner, coming a quick second.

The two piece band started at 8pm and the tiny tots (about 4 years old) started the dancing).

This is one of the many things we enjoy the most - seeing their little villages and enjoying the local people who are so hospitable and friendly.

Could have stayed here forever but as the saying goes "life is too short" so we are keen to move on though at a much lesser pace and with no more long distances to travel planned - short is sweet!

### **Sunday 8th and Monday 9th July**

#### **[Trittenheim - Germany](#)**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Reisemobilplatz Trittenheim - GPS N49.824310 E6.902990**

It just gets better - there are so many stellplatz's along the Mosel to choose from and they get such high ratings and comments that it is difficult to choose and most are only a few kms apart.

Trittenheim is one of the larger villages and is in such a beautiful setting.

We sit on the edge of the Mosel and watch the pleasure craft go by.

Dredges taking goods up and down the river and cruise boats taking passengers to wherever.

Swans peacefully glide along the river and come up on the bank just in front of us.

Across the river, the vineyards cascade down the mountainside for as far as you can see and in front of these, bikers can take the river bike way for hundreds of kms.

Took to the bikes and visited little villages along the river stopping at a Yachthaven at Neumagen Dhron (though no yachts only powered pleasure craft here) for a shandy.

Has been ideal weather over the last few days so have had the Aussie BBQ "German Style" most nights - though not sure how much longer my driver will be able to stomach the spiced meats 🤔.

## **Tuesday - Saturday 10-14 July**

### **Minheim – Germany**

#### **Our campsite for four nights: Sonneninsel Minheim, Minheim - GPS N49.865929 E6.941790**

Such a breeze only travelling short distances as we travel along the Mosel.

Which Stellplatz today I ask?

We had such a wonderful time in Minheim in October, couldn't go past this Stellplatz again.

Only a bike track separating Ziggy to the banks of the Mosel and again vineyards hugging the hills on the other side.

Grapevines are in full bloom now with young grape bunches starting to develop - certainly prettier now than in October where it was the end of the season.

It is now officially the silly season here (summer holidays) but so far we have still been able to get front row seats to the views though the number of Mohos in campgrounds and on the road has increased dramatically.

Think the secret is to arrive between 10.30 and 12.30 because after 2pm front row seats are rare.

Bike trails hug the river on both sides so spent the four days riding between villages on both sides.

Only a short distance away, crossing the bridge takes you to the really great village of Piesport.

There are a couple of Stellplatz's closer where you can walk to the village but we opted for the quieter, shadier and greener spot at Minheim.

We spent some wonderful hours last time at Piesport, sitting at the Moselblick Restaurant right on the banks and watching the boats go by.

Boat traffic was a little quieter this time as it was not the weekend.

Biked a few more kms and landed back in Neumagan-Dhron.

We had biked there from Trittenheim the day before but entered the village from the other direction this time.

Stopped at the Yachthaven for a beer before returning the 10kms back to Minheim.

Four great days of sunshine (though it is getting hotter by the day) and lots of biking left us exhausted but happy at the end of each day.

A really great Stellplatz and comes highly recommended.

## **Sunday - Tuesday 15-16 July**

We are searching for shady spots now (would you believe it!).

After spending more than 15 months of colder temps we are now searching for some shade as we are not accustomed to the sun any longer.

## Wintrich – Germany

### **Our campsite for two nights: Mosel Stellplatz Wintrich, Wintrich - GPS N49.883629 6.948370**

This Stellplatz fitted the bill nicely with row upon row of majestic tall trees along the riverfront and we found a spot that kept us in the shade for most of the day.

Biked into Bernkastel-Kues around 12 kms away.

We visited here in October but were limited by time so could not do the village justice.

This time we arrived before lunch and spent the afternoon here.

It is a tourist Mecca with larger river cruise boats using it as a stopover.

The old town on one side of the river is spectacular and was alive with tourists.

Such fairytale buildings with flower boxes in full bloom were in and around the town square.

The main residential part is on the other side but again some great sights along the riverfront.

Villages pop up everywhere and it so enjoyable exploring them.

Stopped on the riverbank when we saw the most amazing castle on the riverfront on the other side.

Most castles are high on hills but this one was waterfront.

Thankful to arrive back at Ziggy to find her still in the shade and crashed on the chairs for a well deserved rest.

Another highly recommended Stellplatz particularly if you want to visit Bernkastel-Kues, though there is a day parking spot for Mohos within a short walk to the old town.

## Losnich – Germany

### **Our campsite for one night: Stellplatz im Moselvorland, Losnich - GPS N49.975140 E7.043320**

It is well into the afternoon so our hopes of finding a waterfront spot diminish but here a few shady spots were left on the waterfront and within five minutes of grabbing one of the last ones, we opted to move to the back row where some large trees gave us shade for the rest of the afternoon and still had views of the river.

Enjoyed a great rump steak cooked on the BBQ and a good red (all from Lidl!) until the sun left the sky at about 10.15pm.

### **Tuesday & Wednesday 17 - 18 July**

Topped up with gas and food which took a while and along the way we came across the castle (The Schloss Lieser) we saw from the other side of the Mosel.

It is the most striking building in this village and looks very modern with walls of glass and windows facing onto the river - the village is stunning and is certainly worth a walk around.

Morning brought with it another beautiful sunny and hot day so found a shady spot at the front and after a long walk through this village relaxed and read for the rest of the day.

Quaint village and buildings with lots of Weingut's offering wine tasting but little else.

The only shop in town (bakery with a couple of other items) was open from 7am to 11am only.

Beautiful view across the river and vineyards enjoyed by a constant line of cyclists heading in all directions - very relaxing.

### **Thursday & Friday 19 & 20 July**

#### **[Enkirch – Germany](#)**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Moselvorgelände Enkirch - GPS N49.983631 E7.121740**

It is getting hotter by the day and as we have travelled the last 15 months in much cooler weather, we are struggling to stay cool now.

The temperatures are now in the mid thirties so our choice of overnight sites rely mostly on the ability to park in the shade somewhere.

This is a large Stellplatz and while there were a couple of front row riverfront spots, opted to tuck in under some massive trees where we had shade all day.

No biking over these two days as it was just too hot.

Not a very interesting village but had a bottle shop which was also the villages supermarket, variety store and post office.

A small bakery and fruit shop uptown filled all the gaps for everything else we needed.

Struggled at first with the hard crusty bread rolls but are now finding we would not go back to the soft ones we have back home.

Look forward to these for lunch each day.

Most stellplatz's have a daily bread service and it is amusing watching the queues form around the bakers truck each morning.

They also have the equivalent of a Mr Whippy - an Italian ice cream vendor - that comes around twice daily and it gets as much attention -if not more - than the bread man.

The Europeans really love their ice cream!

Met Ted and Desley here from Tamborine Mountain in Queensland in the late afternoon and spent some really wonderful hours until late catching up with news of their travels and sharing some of ours.

So refreshing hearing the Aussie accent again as it is not often we run into Aussies particularly so close to our own back yard.

Continued the conversation next morning and soon it was lunchtime before we knew it.

The Camping Fuhrer came round to collect the rent so made a quick decision to stay on - the shade was just too good to leave!

Had another BBQ on the Cadac - such a wonderful compact and very versatile friend now.

### **Saturday 21st July**

The stellplatz (motorhomes only) are now filling quite early as it is the summer holidays and we are finding it more difficult to find good spots now.

Many of the camping areas (tents and caravans) are already filled to capacity with little more than room to swing a cat.

The tents are like small houses - so glad we do not have to camp in these sites.

We also have the advantage of not needing electricity so often find good spots in the unpowered areas - our solar panels are magic and we cannot understand why so many Mohos do not have them.

### **Reil – Germany**

#### **Our campsite for one night: Moselufer, Reil - GPS N50.026272 E7.14530**

Another great spot where we stayed in back in October - so just had to revisit.

One of the best bike rides we have experienced which over 25 kms takes you through vineyards now covered in lush green leaves heavy with bunches of grapes.

We pass by a tractor towing a covered wagon where tourists occupy fresh air (air conditioned) seats and are taken for a vineyard tour and up to the local castle high on the hill.

The bikeway is just wide enough for the tractor so cyclists move to the side to let it pass.

The trail meanders through the hills providing splendid river views.

We passed by several villages including the fairytale village of Briedel and finally ending up at Zell.

Stopped in a riverfront Weingut (wine bar) and sampled a cool Mosel Reisling before heading back.

The local Imbiss (snack bar) at the campsite was in full swing so joined in with the crowd which became more intimate when a storm hit and we all huddled in a small covered area for a couple of hours.

Had intended to eat there but the vendor closed early as we were pretty much water logged with no room to eat.

Watched sodden bike riders pass by, happy not to have been caught in this storm.

## **Sunday & Monday 22 & 23rd July**

Stopped in at Zell Barl where there is a massive commercial shopping area with every conceivable store you would want.

Sent the driver off to buy things on the men's shopping list while I stocked up on the eats and drinks.

### **Zell – Germany**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: An Der Fussgangerbrücke, Zell - GPS N50.029400 E7.177740**

We visited this village by bike on the previous day so just had to spend more time here.

The village is on both sides of the river and the campsite was right at the entrance to the pedestrian bridge leading to Old Town on the other side.

Just an amazing little place where the buildings on the river were mostly privately owned, colourful three storey Bavarian style homes and tucked away behind these, the Main Street was a market street with numerous restaurants and quaint little shops.

Strolled up and down and took in the atmosphere, stopping at an Imbiss on the river for a cool ale.

The stellplatz is on the outskirts of the camping area where the summer crowds were packed in like sardines.

Lovely view across to Old Town Zell from the Stellplatz but a long walk to the facilities which were on the far end of the campsite about 800m away.

We were not lucky enough to snag one of the shady spots here so felt the heat of the afternoon sun.

## **Tuesday 24th July 2018**

### **Neef – Germany**

#### **Our campsite for one night: Moselvorgelände, Neef - GPS N50.095051 E7.137050**

We are suffering from the constant heat now and there is no sign of it letting up.

Strange how we were so looking forward to some warmer weather - now we say "bring back the cool".

It appears from the news that a lot of Europe and Britain is suffering from the unusually hotter weather.

We sight a beautiful shady Stellplatz on the other side of the river and soon we are parked under some huge trees.

Not long after we discover why there are lots of spare spots.

The train line runs about 50 metres behind and immediately above the Stellplatz with regular passenger and freight trains running.

The train noise is just bearable however they are expanding the train tunnel so the noise from the earthmoving equipment - not to mention the blasting first thing in the morning and last thing at night - was a little harder to accept.

Decision time - shade or noise? - shade won hands down so we hopped on the bikes to do some exploring.

Not a lot to see in the village but the ride through the vineyards led us to the ruins of an old cathedral dating back to the year 1132 and just below this, a small beach on the river bend.

We wondered why there were so many cars here in the middle of nowhere but soon saw the kids and the blow up canoes occupying every spare inch of the three metre wide beach!

The bike trail became harder as tarmac gave way to stones so turned back.

Trees and shade provided some relief from the heat but the temperature inside Ziggy remained at 32 degrees well into the night.

### **Wednesday 25th - Friday 27th July**

Travelled a fair distance up and down the Mosel river looking for another shady spot to beat the heat.

### **[Sankt Aldegund – Germany](#)**

### **Our campsite for three nights: Moselufer Sankt Aldegund - GPS N50.080662. E7.131390**

Bingo! - the best spot here had just become available so we grabbed this quickly.

The only spot right on the rivers edge, where the tree was large enough to give us shade morning and afternoon.

We were the envy of many around us.

The riverside bike trails were excellent and we headed back to Zell, this time another 20km round trip from south to north passing by quite a few great little villages - it was just so hot so stopped a few times along the way for refreshments.

Couldn't wait to get out of the sun, so turned the bike batteries on and peddled hard and fast back to our shady spot under the trees.

It is still mid thirties under the trees and the breeze is hot, so not much relief expected over the next few days.

Nicholas, Lisa and their white Swiss German shepherd Carly (from near Dortmund, Germany) camped next to us.

We watched as they played with Carly and swam in the Mosel river.

So many of the campers here swam in the river and though it was very tempting, we could not.

Hot as we were, we did not venture in as the river is so murky and barges come within metres of where we were camped.



The barges are massive with most being between 110 and 178 metres long and they pass by every few minutes.

A road separated our Stellplatz and the village and there on the edge of the road, large Marques were being erected for a Weinfest on the weekend.

Went to the opening night of the Weinfest on Friday night where the "wine queen" for the region was chosen and we sampled 10 X 100 ml shots of local wines as part of the festivities.

We received a special embossed wine glass (to take home) as well.

The band "California Dreams" played so many of the songs we know well (in English) as well as many German Folk Songs.

Nicholas, Lisa and Carly joined us at long trestle tables and together we all finished the one litre of white wine sampling over five hours and danced the night away.

Happily staggered across the road to Ziggy where we had more nightcaps and watched as the party continued on until 2am.

We were all a bit slow getting up next morning so after a large breakfast and lunch we headed off again.

The Weinfest was running for another three nights and we had no plans to stay on while the Weinfest partied until 2am each day!

We also met and befriended a lovely older couple Wilhelm & Greet from Holland.

Wilhelm's son is a Hymer specialist in Holland and we are seriously considering a visit to his workshop to get Ziggy serviced before heading to the UK for our last couple of weeks.

Wilhelm helped my driver replace a front light globe - how good is that!

### **Saturday 28th July**

#### **[Alken – Germany](#)**

#### **Our campsite for one night: Wohnmobilstellplatz, Alken - GPS N50.250931 E7.445730**

Only a very small Stellplatz with five squeeze (or four comfortable places) but situated on the Mosel right next to this great little village.

It is a tourist stopover with buses bringing in loads of tourists.

Also a day stop over for cruise boats so the restaurants and tourist shops are rally busy when the boats are in.

Burg Thurant (a castle) stands high on the hill overlooking the town and is a popular tourist stop.

Great place to visit and the views across the river are great but suggest, if you intend to stay in Alken, to leave early in the morning (before business hours) as the car parking that runs parallel to the Stellplatz makes it very tight for Mohos turning onto the street when leaving.

## **Sunday 29th & Monday 30th July**

Sadly we left the Mosel and headed for the Rhine.

Have had a few great weeks of touring along the Mosel and have seen so many wonderful villages.

### **Urmitz – Germany**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Am Rhein, Urmitz - GPS N50.418449. E7.524550**

Wilhelm suggested this Stellplatz as a great place to camp to visit Koblenz.

With the train station only a five minute walk away and Koblenz three stops or 10 minutes ride - this is a great spot for visiting Koblenz.

Only downside are the pitches are tight - narrow at the front and wider at the back so very little room to put out sun awnings.

It was as hot as Hades and we were in full sun until 9pm at night.

Felt like being in a sauna - sat under the trees for the afternoon and watched the millions of heavily laden barges go by.

So much more river traffic on the Rhine than the Mosel.

Another really hot and sunny day forecast for day two so were tempted to leave here and park somewhere else in the shade for the day while visiting Koblenz.

Just as we were ready to drive out, a Moho was leaving the only shady spot in this Stellplatz.

Collected my deck chair and headed for the spot, sat down in the middle of it and waited for my driver to come over - no one was going to take this spot away from me!

Happy to be in the shade now, we headed for the train station.

### **Koblenz - Germany**

Had many fond memories of Koblenz when we spent some time here in 1978 and went in search of our favourite restaurant in Old Town.

Sadly the old area on the junction of the Mosel and Rhine had been replaced by new and modern apartment buildings so the restaurant was no longer there.

We walked for hours around the Old Town which is pretty much all mall area now with hundreds of shops and restaurants with only a handful of the older buildings still standing.

The Deutsches Ecke (German corner) was as stunning as ever with the huge statue of stallion and rider guarding the entry to the two great rivers.

Seilbahn's took you high above the river to the castle on the other side - the scenery is just amazing.

Beautiful tree lined streets through parks offered lots of shade as we walked back toward the centre of Old Town.

Stopped for lunch in one of the many street restaurants and enjoyed one of the best meals we have had in a restaurant since the beginning of our trip (Turkey breast in pepper sauce).

Time to return to our shady spot in Urmitz so back to the Bahnhof for what was the hottest and most stifling ride ever.

The train was not air-conditioned and all the windows were fixed so could not open them to get fresh air.

It must have been 40 degrees inside and the ten minutes in there waiting for the train to leave the station and the ten minute ride home left us exhausted and dripping wet.

Everyone is complaining about how unusually hot it has been in Germany this summer.

Back to Ziggy in full shade, and on the river, was still uncomfortable.

Even after our shower with taps set to full on cold - provided little relief.

Sat on the riverbank until the sun went down at 10pm.

Fortunately the nights cool down and soon we were back to the mid twenties around midnight.

### **Tuesday 31st July**

Made the decision to leave the rivers as there seems to be little shade on offer and no cooling breezes and head for the high country.

### **Bonn – Germany**

**Our campsite for tonight: Freizeitpark An Der Rheinaue, Bonn - GPS  
N50.709862. E7.138890**

Priority was to find shade and cooler temperatures.

We stopped in a Forest for lunch and a cool break for a few hours before heading off again.

We are heading north now away from the mighty and beautiful, but busy Mosel and Rhine rivers.

Too many holiday makers in this area and after more than a year where we have been pretty much alone, it is hard to get used to wall to wall campers though we have not had any troublesome neighbours.

Where every second vehicle we passed on the riverside roads was a motorhome, they are becoming scarcer as we travel higher into the mountains on side roads.

It feels like autumn already as the trees are changing colour and millions of leaves are already littering the ground – a lack of water and the heat here probably causing this.

This Stellplatz in southern Bonn is gratis and solely for motorhomes.

Giant trees on both sides gave us all day shade and right next door is the most magnificent park.

Only downside is that it is close to a four lane road which was a little noisy, but no problems during the night, even with the windows open.

We heard in the distance, what sounded like a band setting up.

Soon cars started filling the carpark on the other side and once this was full, they parked in the spare Moho spots around us.

It is so frustrating that we are not allowed to park in carparks but cars do not have a problem with taking up the limited "Moho only parking spots".

Justice was served as the local council car pulled up and started booking the cars in the Moho area - first time we have seen this.

We had a particularly irate parking offender, question us on the ticket issue and not satisfied with our answer (in German) and then checked out the tickets given to the other cars.

Concert finished around 11pm and we slept like babies.

### **Wednesday 1st August**

#### **Hachenburg – Germany**

**Our campsite for tonight: Am Burggarten, Hachenburg - GPS N50.662720. E7.827220**

Small carpark with 8 shady spaces allotted for Mohos.

Set beside a beautiful treed park which is part of the castle grounds called Burggarten .

Lovely little village with a small Old Town of cobbled stone streets and narrow alleys.

The castle was disappointing - three levels set in two quadrants, an inner and outer with courtyard in the middle. – it is now a functioning university - certainly looks more like a university not a castle.

A band was setting up in the small square which apparently happens every Thursday night in the summer months.

Opted not to stay the Thursday night as some comments in our APP referred to young people using this carpark as a gathering point in the evenings.

Did not experience this on our first night so did not want to chance our luck for a second night.

### **Thursday 2nd and Friday 3rd August**

#### **Frankenberg – Germany**

**Our campsite for two nights: Ederberglandhalle, Frankenberg - GPS N51.056519. E8.802170**

This is a really great little Stellplatz with huge pitches and trees and walls of high shrubs everywhere - very private and cool and quiet.

Met up with a great German couple, Hermann and Waltraud, from Urmitz - we stayed in Urmitz only a few nights ago while visiting Koblenz.

Frankenberg was Hermann & Waltraud's home town many years ago so they were able to give us a run down on the village.

They also have a brother living in Mt Tamborine in Queensland, Australia, which is probably only about 50 km from where we live.

There was a 60's band scheduled to play in the new part of town in the evening so we ambled down and joined in the festivities.

Interesting concept where you purchased a glass (wine or beer which actually was plastic) for €5 each and then €2 coupons to use for eats and drinks.

You couldn't get a drink without the purchased glass.

Food and drink stations were set up and you used your coupons to purchase these.

The purchase of the glasses was an entry charge to cover the cost of the band.

Band was great (though we did not know any of the songs which were certainly not from the 60's and were all sung in German) - would say around 1000 people crowded the square.

Really enjoyed the Old Town next day.

The Rathaus (town hall) in Old Town was one of the best we have seen – we seem to keep saying that with every new Rathaus we see.

Looks like a small fairytale medieval castle.

Cobbled stoned streets and quaint little shops and again the wonderful three storey houses (Fachwerk) were a treat.

The Old Town is at the top of a hill and surrounding the old cathedral, beautiful parks and gardens offer a magnificent view of the town below.

It was a steep climb to the Old Town and the area is very hilly but well worth the effort.

The Stellplatz is gratis and also has the bonus of free wifi which works throughout the old and new towns.

Certainly appreciated having the wi fi as we had quite a long on line chat with Qantas when they advised our return flights had changed - leaving us with 37 hours on planes and in airports on the way home - not happy Jan!

Quite a saga but finally managed to get an earlier flight which gets us home 12 hours earlier than original flight- hope there are no other changes!!

### **Saturday 4th August**

Arrived at our first choice of campsites in Fritzlar to find a circus tent erected opposite the Stellplatz and absolutely no shade whatsoever.

No way was this suitable but as we really wanted to see this village we found a shaded spot nearby the swimming pool.

On with the walking shoes (third pair for me now) and trekked uphill to the old town.

Another wonderful Old Town and St Peters Cathedral where again they were setting up a stage abutting the Cathedral for an evening concert.

This week is one of the two to three busiest weeks of the summer season and nearly every place we have visited during this time is "partying" big time.

The town is encircled with a 2.5 km fortified wall where there are at least a dozen Turms (towers) guarding the city.

Just outside the walled gates we came across a parking area for Mohos and out of 6 - there were two spots left (we couldn't believe our luck).

We hurried back down the hill and returned ASAP to find we were in still in luck - still two spots left.

What a win as this was only 100 metres from the centre of Old Town.

### [Fritzlar – Germany](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking Fritzlar - N51.132210. E9.269740**

Still amazingly hot well into the late afternoon so after a few cool drinks we headed into the square for dinner (great pizza) and then to the concert.

Great night but at 10.30 pm the temp was still in the mid thirties!

### **Sunday 5th August**

We have been on the German Fairytale Road over the last few days now.

Named as such because the Brothers Grimm lived here and it is where the fairy tales were written.

### [Baunatal – Germany](#)

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Wohnmobil Stellplatz, Baunatal -GPS N51.256340. E9.398870**

This is a huge stadium parking area where there are avenues of trees shading the parking places (for cars) and right next door is the Stellplatz - out in the open - without a tree to be seen.

It amazes us that most of the Moho owners in Germany are not bothered by the sun and have no issues with frying in the full sun in their sauna boxes.

TV reception is their first priority and electricity is second - most do not seem to have solar panels.

We parked in the shady car spots for the rest of the day and moved into the Stellplatz in the evening.

Did not venture out of the shade today so cannot report on this town.

### **Monday 6th August 2018:**

Wanted to stay at the Stellplatz in Wilhelmshöhe but it was closed with the whole parking area now under re construction.

Using our NAVIE we found a carpark a little further up the hill which was almost directly opposite the entrance to Bergpark Wilhelmshöhe, home to Schloss Wilhelmshöhe a late 18th century palace.

This is a huge park of rainforests, castles and ruins, fountains and grottoes, statues and water features.

We spent a really wonderful couple of hours exploring this park.

There are tours offered to visit the palace where several buildings have been turned into museums of fine art.

It is not open everyday (closed today of course) but the gardens and whole park is open and free to just wander through at any time.

From the castle you get a fine view of the statue of Hercules high on the hill a few kms away.

We ventured about halfway there but as it was so hot, decided to go back to Ziggy to see if we could get closer by car.

There is a huge car park there and soon we found our way to the statue.

A small entry fee of around €3 takes you through and up a million steps through the castle ruins to a terrace just below the statue offering a spectacular view to the city of Kassel.

Another steep narrow spiral staircase takes you to the bottom of the statue.

Really a must do in the area, as the Bergpark Castle and gardens and the Hercules statue were truly amazing.

### [Hann - Munden – Germany](#)

### **Our campsite for tonight: Wohnmobil Stellplatz Am Wesertein, Hann - Munden - GPS N51.420368. E648620**

What a surprise package this town was.

The Stellplatz is part of a huge carpark on the edge of the Weser River with an area in the middle dedicated for Mohos.

This area was in full sun so like many other Mohos, we found a spot under shady trees designated for cars.

An old pedestrian bridge took us to the Altstadt (The Old Town) just across the river where we were treated to street after cobbled stoned street of Fachwerk (half timber) houses all freshly painted in different colours and beautifully restored.

The Main Street again offering numerous restaurants and Italian Eis cream cafes where for around €7 you could indulge in an ice cream masterpiece.

Have been tempted - but the problem I have is deciding which to have!

The Weser River is no match for it's big sisters Mosel and Rhine but through this town it cascades over small waterfalls and we watched many canoeists and swimmers enjoying the cool water.

## **Tuesday 7th August**

### **Gottingen – Germany**

**Our campsite for tonight: Badeparadies Eisweise, Gottingen - GPS  
N51.523151. E9.930640**

A small but busy Stellplatz that filled very quickly by lunchtime.

It is set right beside the indoor and outdoor swimming complex where we literally watched hundreds upon hundreds of people coming in all day.

Even under the shady trees the temperature was in the mid to high thirties.

Couldn't get any energy up to attempt a walk into town so just sat and tried to stay cool.

There is a great Greek restaurant right at the entrance to the swimming complex and an Italian only 100 metres away but neither of us could even think about food.

Even by bedtime around 11pm it was still in the mid thirties so a good peaceful night's sleep didn't happen.

## **Wednesday & Thursday 8th & 9th August**

Really wanted to see this renowned University town as early as possible so walked the km+ walk into town.

Three great churches in the centre but couldn't get the right distance to take pictures.

Visited the Ganseliesel (little goose statue), the symbol of this town located in the Markt square.

She is hailed locally as the most kissed woman in the world.

Lots of interesting Fachwerk houses were scattered throughout the centre but we found it didn't have the same feel as some of the smaller villages we have visited.

Still really hot so sauntered back to Ziggy and moved on.

### **Wahlsburg – Germany**

**Our campsite for two nights: Landhotel Zum Anker, Wahlsburg - GPS  
N51.624432. E9.552230**

Lovely shady spot on the Weser river.

Long lines of huge trees offered shade for nearly everyone though some Mohos still sat out in the searing heat.

The hotel was a treat with large outside shaded areas where we enjoyed a fabulous meal.

We watched the little ferry taking the local cars and bikes across the river.

There are many of these along this river with very few vehicular bridges in between.

No one seems to pay when they board so guess it is provided gratis by the community.



We are in the country now and apart from the river and the small village behind, there are fields of crops and farms with horses, geese and even llama that come right to the fence line.

There are some really great bikeways along the Weser so decided to take off the bikes and explore some of the nearby villages.

Sat at every opportunity for some iced water and shade until late afternoon when the dark clouds appeared and then with the sound of thunder shortly thereafter, turned on the batteries and scooted the 10kms back home at a much faster rate than normal.

The rain was cooling but the lack of wiper blades on the glasses, didn't help the visibility.

Got back just as the really heavy rain started.

The temperature dropped from 32 degrees when we got home to a cool 25 degrees in less than an hour and remained at that for the rest of the night - so wonderful to be cool after about 4 weeks of sweltering conditions.

### **Friday & Saturday 10th & 11th August**

#### **Hoxter – Germany**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Flossplatz Hoxter - GPS N51.773689. E9.387150**

Again on the Weser with the village just across a small bridge.

Just when we thought we had seen it all - the village square is just a picture.

Some of the best Fachwerk houses are located along the Main Street and the Cathedral with the twin spires is awesome.

The temperatures have stayed in the low to mid twenties and we are relishing the cool conditions.

We even put on a jacket to sit outside and enjoy our steak on the BBQ with a good red until the sun disappeared.

So lovely to wake up to a cool day and not having to be mindful to select a campsite in the shade.

Decided to stay here another night.

Headed off on the bikes after breakfast to explore Schloss Welterbe Corvey only a few kms away.

The bikeway was wide and easy and picturesque.

Today part of the Schloss was set up with a floral and art display and as we arrived at the entrance we were greeted with hundreds of cars and bikes parked in the large grounds.

Another UNESCO world heritage site, this castle is similar to Wilhelmshohe - a low three storey structure spread over acres with its own dual spired church and stables and outhouses set in beautifully manicured lawns and gardens.

Had a race with a horse and carriage on the way back.

They let us pass and soon they were hot on our heels - it was fun to hear the horses hooves so close clattering along the roadway and we could almost feel the hot breath from the horses as they were so close.

Back through the town and then followed the river to a series of canals where every spare space on the waters edge was taken up with campsites.

The ride was really enjoyable today in the cooler temperatures so took our time exploring before heading back to another well cooked BBQ by my driver (chef extraordinaire).

### **Tuesday to Thursday - 14th to 16th August**

#### **Grohnde – Germany**

#### **Our campsite for three nights: Grohnder Fahrhaud, Grohnde - GPS N52.019440 E9.177460**

This Stellplatz was one of the most well kept, organised and with the best bathroom facilities by far of any that we have stayed in.

The Stellplatz is fully automatic – at the entry gate you take a ticket which grants entry to the site and you use that ticket to gain credit for electricity, should you want it.

The ticket also grants entry to the toilets and showers and rubbish disposal areas.

On departing the ticket is inserted in the machine again and you insert the required amount in the machine - the machine also grants a credit for any unused electricity – have never seen that before.

The Stellplatz has two parts, the first being at the entry to the resort with only mountain and rural views, while the second and smaller area around the corner from the resort, was directly on the Weser River.

Here we scored the prime corner position which gave us both the rural and mountains view on one side and the river, parklands and the village on the other. Primo!!

The bathrooms as mentioned before were equivalent to those provided in a five star hotel and as much hot water for as long as you wanted - very rare to find and took advantage of this for a few LONG HOT showers during our stay.

The resort itself included a camping area, Stellplatz for us, cabins as well as large grassed areas for tents on the river with huts and fireplaces for use in the winter.

Placed mid way between Hamelin (the Pied Pipers home) and Bodenwerder, it was ideal as a central point to visit both towns over the next few days.

The Weser Bikeway passes through the middle of the Stellplatz so was ideal to head off in both directions.

This Stellplatz really caters for cyclists – they have a “Bicycle service station” where electric bikes can be charged, a pneumatic pump with guage for pumping up tyres, a

vending machine dispensing tyre tubes of various brands and lockable cages for bikes overnight.

We cycled 60+ kms over two days on the bikes with the bikeway being so great, we did not need to use the batteries at all.

At the end of day two - found sore muscles where I didn't know there were muscles.

On the bike trips we passed through fields of corn, fruit groves where apple, pear and peach trees grow wild along the bike path, various vegetables, shady forests and sleepy little villages and a Nuclear Power Station midway between Grohnde and Hamelin.

Hamelin was a real treat with the Altstadt displaying so many beautiful old buildings.

Certainly should be on the "to visit list".

Here you can find the Pied Piper Museum (he stands guard at the entrance), souvenir shops eager to sell you rats in all shapes and sizes from cuddly stuffed ones to those made of wood.

The Main Street even has rat tiles strategically placed on the cobbled stone street - these tiles lead you to the river.

On the hour, the Rathaus (town hall) about 15 bells of different sizes begin to chime and high up on the building, large metal doors open then the Pied Piper appears leading the children away.

There is a large Turkish community in Hamelin.

The bike trip to Bodenwerder next day was equally special where we passed by similar stunning scenery - not a patch on Hamelin but still worth seeing.

### **Friday 17th August**

#### **Mehlbergen – Germany**

**Our campsite for tonight: Marina Mehlbergen - GPS N52.687351. E9.177460**

Very quiet peaceful location at a small marina in the middle of nowhere just off the Weser.

The harbour housed about 40 small boats where there was a bit of activity with owners coming down to have a drink on the back decks when the sun went down.

Brought back a lot of memories of our boating days and with it the longing and desire to again set out to sea on our return.

A little cafe at the end of the marina became the focal point for happy hour.

### **Saturday 18th August**

#### **Bruchhausen- Vilsen – Germany**

**Our campsite for tonight: Wohnmobilstellplatz, Bruchhausen- Vilsen - N52.826752. E8.995330**

Grassy and open area surrounded totally with large trees and scrubs.

The campsite is very tranquil with a good amenities block which is shared by the children's playground next door.

Wifi is provided compliments of the tourist bureau but for one device only (we got caught having turned Wifi on our Iphone when in the tourist office and then on returning to Ziggy could not turn Wifi on our laptop.)

Typical tidy German town but with no Old Town however lots of great Fachwerk houses.

Steam trains are a feature in this town with lots of old ones to see at the railway station. The train leaves regularly for joy riders.

Very quiet and peaceful until the fireworks started at about midnight.

Some of the local lads letting off steam no doubt, but only lasted for a few minutes and all was quiet again.

### **Sunday 19th August**

#### **Bremen – Germany**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Reisemobilstellplatz am Kuhhirten, Bremen - GPS N53.064499. E8.819340**

The Stellplatz itself was very crowded with very tight spaces (about 100) however in a lovely treed setting.

Very expensive with the bathroom and WC facilities available at an additional cost.

Wifi is included but when the park was full, virtually impossible to get even connected let alone send or receive an email.

There is no TV reception because of the trees so all the locals switch to Internet to stay amused and compete with each other for reception.

The huge plus here is that a pathway runs beside the Stellplatz and within a couple of minutes walk you arrive at the Weser river where a small passenger ferry takes you to the other side.

A further ten minutes scenic walk along the riverbank takes you to the beginning of the Altstadt.

You can also bike it as the path is shared by everyone - today we opted to walk the short distance.

We rate this old town highly and it is amongst some of the best we have seen. There is so much to see here, it took us all afternoon into evening to see everything we wanted to see.

The Schnoor quarter is Bremen's oldest district and is a maze of 15/16th century houses lining the cobble stone alleys and is now home to artists and goldsmith workshops and galleries.

Took time out to visit a lollipop shop to see how they are hand made - yum.

Saw lots of tourists eating these huge lollipops.

Böttcherstrasse, a pedestrianised arcade, is Bremen's "secret high street" with a gilt relief called "Bringer of Light" and a carillon made from Meissen porcelain.

Next to the Market Square is the home of the 5.55 m Roland statue - the most famous of the 26 Roland statues in Germany.

Here also is the Gerhard Marcks bronze statue of the Bremen Town Musicians - this is a Grimms Fairy tale of four ageing mistreated domestic animals, who run away and become musicians in the Bremen.

It is believed that if you rub the donkeys legs your wish will come true - both statues are well photographed by tourists.

The whole area is gob smacking with street after street of cathedrals and churches and the amazing town hall (Rathaus).

Schütting (guild hall) built in 1537 is now the chamber of commerce - all have a huge "wow factor"

Really should be included in the "must see list".

Enjoyed a lunch and a cool drink in one of the market square restaurants and people watched and rested before returning back along the riverfront, across with the ferry and home.

There is a man-made beach and café the "Sand Cafe" on the campsite side of the river where hundreds of locals were sunning and swimming.

Could not get a seat in the overcrowded restaurant so back to Ziggy for a quick snack.

Had a really super day in Bremen.

### **Monday 20th August**

#### **Bremerhaven – Germany**

**Our campsite for tonight: Schaufenster Fischereihafen, Bremerhaven - GPS N53.526531. E8.577130**

This port is home to all sorts of ships including a submarine in the harbour.

Some very modern high-rise buildings are on the waterfront with a massive museum that houses maritime memorabilia.

There are two other Stellplatz closer to the centre but chose this one because it had spectacular views of the harbour and uninterrupted breezes which the others did not.

The waterfront hub just a few minutes walk away has a trendy area of restaurants and shopping areas made by using the existing old warehouses and buildings.

Very trendy and a little like Fremantle in Australia though a smaller version.

Dropped into the local tyre place and ordered a new shoe for Ziggy (arriving tomorrow) and then spent a pleasant afternoon walking around the harbourfront.

### **Tuesday 21st August**

Ziggy is happy with her new shoe and my driver booked her in for a wheel alignment and balance (tomorrow) so we stay close to Bremerhaven for another day.

### Dedesdorf – Germany

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking Dedesdorf, Dedesdorf - GPS N53.444061. E8.499520**

Great little Stellplatz taking only five Mohos (each space clearly defined by lines) and we were lucky enough to be last in.

Beautiful location right next to the river with a long beach which is great at high tide, but mud flats at low tide.

Off with the bikes for a ride through the countryside which is now very flat with little or no mountains anywhere in sight.

Arrived back to find a small Moho (Van conversion – we call them “door slammers” or “whiz-bangers”) that had squeezed in between us and our neighbour not leaving even enough room for us to open our habitation door – “not happy Jan”!

Waited until they came back and then politely asked them to move on as we had paid for the pitch.

There were two small cafes on the beachfront with a large car parking area for cars only.

The carpark was full and soon we were told that a musician was booked for the night.

After dinner we carried our deck chairs to the beach and sat and listened to the music while the sun went down.

This spectacular sunset, a couple of drinks and some great music to listen to made it a great night.

It finished quite early at around 9.30pm so back to Ziggy for a coffee.

We were greeted by a young lady armed with a microphone who began to ask us questions about why we had visited Dedesdorf.

She said she was interviewing people for her radio station –

The Driver said we were from Australia and that our German was not very good and that she may be better off interviewing someone else.

She said his German was fine and so she recorded an interview – forgot to find out which station she was from so didn't get to hear the interview on air – but it was all a bit of fun.

### **Wednesday 22nd August**

Started the day by returning to Bremerhaven to have a wheel alignment and balance done after Ziggy got her new shoe yesterday.

## Kleinensiel – Germany

**Our campsite for tonight: Altes Faehr, Kleinensiel - GPS N53.443199. E8.484450**

Small gratis campsite that is advertised as taking 5 Mohos only but at day's end we managed to squeeze in double that number.

Very quiet spot directly opposite side of the river to Dedesdorf with views across the river.

No services here but very peaceful so took the opportunity to do a few chores including clothes washing and spring cleaning in "pink zone" while my driver attended to some items in the "blue zone".

We are at the mouth of the Weser River now and there is a huge amount of boat traffic passing by and so there is always something to see.

The locals come here and spend time on the beach (not one we can appreciate as we have some of the best beaches in the world at our back and front door at home).

**Thursday - Saturday 23 - 25th August**

## Wilhelmshaven – Germany

**Our campsite for three nights: Schleuseninsel, Wilhelmshaven - GPS N53.516621. E8.149680**

Great Stellplatz with only the grassed dyke protecting you from the strong sea breezes (or was that tempest) coming off the North Sea.

There are three Stellplatz along the North Sea front at Wilhelmshaven - all with great aspects but this is a lot more protected, yet close to everything.

Ventured up the grass dyke in front of us and walked for miles along the Seafront.

Views forever out to sea and passed by some magic little seafront holiday bungalows nestled in amongst the trees.

Little passenger boats taking tourists for trips around the harbourfront were packed.

There are bikeways across the top of the dykes that run forever but too cold and windy for us so walking was the choice for today.

Ventured back towards the harbour and walked along the touristy waterfront strand.

This is a pedestrian mall that runs along the top of the dyke for a couple of kms with the beach on one side and restaurants and funky shops on the other.

The beaches are lined with rows of two seater white wicker cane chairs and look like soldiers ready to go to battle and for a mere €9 you can hire one for the day - did not see many occupied!

From there we visited the Deutsches Marinemuseum on the river front where there were submarines, destroyers and many other ships and marine equipment on display.

It was late in the afternoon so opted to go through thoroughly tomorrow.



Woke up to a miserable wet and windy day so bunkered down for some reading and Internet - a bonus this Stellplatz has a Wifi network but the other two don't.

It is times like this that we really appreciate Ziggy for the huge amount of habitation space and windows she has, compared to other Mohos.

Weather on day three was a little better though still windy with scattered showers.

Made a move towards town around lunchtime when some patches of blue appeared so packed our wet weather gear in the backpack, dressed in winter gear now as outside temps were around 20 degrees in the middle of the day and walked the three kms into town.

80% of this town was totally demolished during WW11 and they don't appear to have rebuilt it.

One section of ruins and a few bunkers remain as a reminder.

Great shopping mall that runs forever but not much else to see.

Dark heavy black clouds were creeping in on the horizon so our 3km walk home ended up being almost a run.

We made it home with a minute to spare before the heavens opened up and it pelted down hail for about 20 minutes.

### **Sunday 26th August**

BRRRRR!!! Summer is over, we think, as we woke to a cool 14 degrees this morning (inside Ziggy), single figures we believe were reached overnight - did we miss the rest of summer?

### **Sudbrookmerland (near Bedekaspe) - Germany**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Grosses Meer, Sudbrookmerland (near Bedekaspe)**

Such a shame the weather was so awful with cold wind and very regular showers.

This Stellplatz sits on a large lake which has all the facilities you would want to hire and have a super day on the lake.

A few brave sailors are on the lake and those more energetic hire the pedal boats.

Super children's play ground though it seems the holidays are over as no children are around now.

Took advantage of some breaks in the weather and walked part the way around the beautiful lake but the cold and rain brought us back to the warmth and dry comfort of Ziggy.

Great location for bike riding - but not today.

More rain through the night but by mid morning - sun and blue skies

### **Monday 27th August**

Had some quite heavy rain throughout the night and with no prospects for a fine day here, we moved on soon after brekkie.



## Ditzum - Germany

**Our campsite for tonight: Lebensmittelmarkt Blank, Ditzum - GPS N53.315399. E7.276730**

Small Stellplatz right behind a small supermarket.

No view here but it's location near to a fantastic small fishing village on the Ems River made it a great stopover.

The village is picture perfect with houses with manicured lawns and magnificent colourful country gardens that anyone would be proud to own.

They are nearly all made of flat red brick and flush mortar, white window trim and white shutters.

A couple of minutes walk from the Stellplatz takes you to the harbour where pleasure craft and large fishing boats are lined up (these too are too pretty to be fishing boats and are well cared for).

The ferry does regular trips across the harbour to the town of Emden. The weather was too foul to take the trip across today.

We found out a few days later that this town has lots to see and has a great Stellplatz - sadly we missed this one.

Dykes surround the foreshore and a walk along here where markers certainly showed us just how high the sea rises.

A really wonderful little village to see and worth an overnight or two if you go across to Emden by ferry from here.

## **Tuesday and Wednesday 28th and 29th August**

Still overcast and showery so choice for next two days was based on being in a town or village large enough to have a choice of restaurants and must have a good view and location to the centre of town.

## Haren – Germany

**Our campsite for two nights: Parking Amisia, Haren - GPS N52.788830. E7.247120**

The Stellplatz was situated right on the Ems river with a front and second row view to the river - again got one of the last ones.

This Stellplatz is also gratis and though it has no facilities (which we don't need anyhow) it has everything else we need.

Still bad weather but we headed off to the centre of town (only a couple of minutes walk) to check out the town and the restaurants.

The tourist bureau was very helpful and gave us information on bike ways around the area (Emsland) and recommended a couple of great restaurants.

Great town with lots of development happening.

The cathedral was closed as it was having major restoration and many new buildings were under construction.

These were mainly for seniors living and our feeling is that this town with all its flat walking areas, malls and shops and restaurants will ideally cater for tourists as well as older people looking for a great place to retire to.

Sat on the deck chairs on the riverfront for the rest of the afternoon and had dinner under the stars.

We were lucky to have had a slight break in the weather and enjoyed some rain free time outside.

Watched the river barges going up and down the river, some barely making it under the town's bridge.

Woke up to a beautiful sunny day - at last!! and sang "happy birthday" to my driver, best friend and love of my life.

The birthday brekkie with fresh berries (they have been wonderful over last couple of months) and yoghurt, ham and eggs hit the spot.

Off on the bikes along the riverfront, through rain forests and farmland which took us through the small village of Huntel.

Then by mistake we took a wrong turn and visited Hemsén.

Here we discovered our mistake and backtracked quite a few kms to the bikeway and then all the way to Meppen.

Had travelled about 20kms by this stage so hot and hungry stopped at a riverfront Beergarden for a great lunch and rest.

What a super day it had been and great to have some sunshine for a while.

Headed back along the river this time the trip being a little shorter without our mistaken detour and arrived home very happy but with sore muscles (in legs and bottom in particular).

The sun disappeared and soon heavy clouds appeared - end of a super sunny day.

Headed indoors had a few predinner drinks, showers and headed into town in raincoats and umbrellas.

Trattoria Italian restaurant was the birthday boys choice and we were not disappointed.

Super meal of calamari in a tomato and pepper sauce for my driver and scallopini in a creamy green peppercorn sauce for me was delicious.

Fresh salad and German roast potatoes finished off our mains.

The owner gave us some of his home made grappa which warmed the insides before our trip back home in the rain.

Poured all night so we were so thankful for such a wonderful sunny day

**Thursday 30th August**

## Geeste - Germany

### **Our campsite for tonight: Am Speicherbecken, Geeste - GPS N52.594151. E7.274150**

Our last stopover in Germany now heading towards The Netherlands.

Great huge summer Stellplatz set beside a large lake.

Only permitted to stay here for 24 hours but it is gratis with a great WC.

No neighbours here as it is parallel avenue parking and there are acres of trees and scrubs providing privacy between the avenues.

Really wonderful and cool for summer stopover but a little cool now that the temperatures are dropping.

Weather again overcast with some showers so not ideal to venture too far - highly recommended for summer.

## Holland – The Netherlands

Holland has a population of around 17 million people but has only a small land mass of 41,526 sq. km a large percentage of which is very flat and below sea level.

The official language is Dutch, however most people speak very good English as it is taught from an early age at school.

The currency is the Euro.

Wild camping is forbidden, however, several motorhome friendly municipalities have regulated facilities where overnight parking is allowed.

Ready-made joints, cannabis related products, rolling papers, pipes and bongs can be ordered legally in coffee shops, however we decided to stay on our natural high of just being with each other.

Bicycles can be seen in their millions and the Netherlands has more than 32,000 km of dedicated bicycle paths.

The Dutch are the most prolific travellers of any country we have encountered whilst travelling – whether it be NordKap in the far north of Norway, Sounion on the southern tip of Greece or anywhere in between we always saw the yellow number plates with NL and knew we would be able to speak to them in English and get a smile and help in return.

We were not sure where we wanted to go in Holland – we first visited Holland in 1978 but travelled by EuroRail so we were restricted to cities and towns on the rail network – we were not keen to travel to some of the larger cities we had visited previously, including Amsterdam so decided to ask for help.

We sent an email to our friends Marie-louise and Robert de Reuver for their assistance – they had lived in the village of Oirschot near Maastricht Holland until they moved to near Skierniewice, Poland around 11 years ago.

They suggested around a dozen places to visit.

### **Friday 31st August**

No sign of any border gates and breezed through into The Netherlands from Germany for the first time this trip.

No toll roads which was a huge plus for Germany and now The Netherlands.

The countryside is very flat and green with lots of wind turbines and solar panels in use to store energy.

### **Wierden – Holland**

**Our campsite for tonight: Camperplaats. de Huurne, Wierden - GPS N52.349861. E.6.574310**

A little country village which borders onto the National Park.

This CP has all the services included in the fee of €10 - electricity, water and wifi a bonus inclusion.

Don't need electricity because we have super solar panels and leisure batteries but is good to give the leisure batteries a full charge from time to time.

Beautiful rural setting with heaps of space between Mohos.

Even have a fire pit with timber cut and ready to use.

What a temptation as we love nothing more than sitting by a fire under the stars.

Still very wet under foot so this was not a possibility - shame, shame, shame.

Chickens were roaming about and even saw the largest hare we have ever seen, scooting across the paddock beside the CP.

A really peaceful, quiet setting, well laid out with tourist information and even offer free parking if you eat at one of the local restaurants in Wierden - a wet 2 km hike through the countryside so opted not to do that this time.

### **Saturday & Sunday 1st & 2nd September**

### **Giethoorn – Holland**

**❤❤❤ Our campsite for two nights: Camperplaats Haamstede, Giethoorn - GPS 52.728649. E6.076620**

Giethoorn is affectionately called "the Venice of The North" for very good reasons - just an amazing village and a "must see" on your bucket list.

The CP is just great and is set between green pastures and the canals with a bikeway on both sides of the canal.

There are several CPs in the area, but we found this the best as far as location and services - amazing bathrooms.

Sunshine on both days which made the exploring just wonderful.

Day one we took off on the bikes along the canal where fisherman sat shoulder to shoulder with the longest rods we have ever seen - bit of a hazard for the passing pleasure craft but everyone seemed to work it out.

With the Mecca of canals, comes the draw bridges which have an operator opening and shutting these all day to allow the craft to pass under.

Being a weekend and with a bit of sun, the canals were packed with day trippers in all sorts of weird and wonderful water craft.

The bikeways were really busy and we passed by many marinas in the canal system and small villages along the way.

Sunday we walked across the drawbridge into the touristy area where there were hundreds of people walking along the waterfront canal area and as many boats were lined up all eager to take the tourists on a canal tour.

Restaurant after restaurant was packed with people and souvenir shops selling clogs (even saw slipper clogs).

You can be part of a canal tour where the boats seat about 30 people and provide a guide giving a commentary or you can hire an electric boat and do the trip yourself.

We elected to do the tour for €7.50 each and sat back and were just totally gob smacked.

The hour trip took us through narrow canals where the beautiful homes all featured thatched roofs and country gardens.

Many of these homes are on small islands with the only access to them via small pedestrian bridges.

Many have no cars but a garage that houses a boat - the only way to get to these homes.

People were meandering through these canal streets and enjoying the many trendy restaurants in and around the canals.

Our guide told us there are 1100 boats that use the canals daily - 600 of these are tour boats - the others being home owners and locals.

After the canal tour the boat headed across the massive lake system here.

Give this area a five star for interesting spectacle.

### **Monday 3rd September**

#### **[Almere Haven – Holland](#)**

**Our campsite for tonight: Almere-Haven. Almere Haven - GPS 52.333691. E.52.221710**

Passed over many of these canal drawbridges along the way to our next interim stop over.

This is not one suggested by our friends but a stop on the way to the next one they suggested.

Lots of roadworks gave my driver and NAVIE a head ache but finally got around these to the harbour.

Only two Moho spots available here but we are directly on the harbour front overlooking a sea of yachts and large cruisers.

Restaurants again line the foreshore, but the harbourmaster informed us they had just finished a harbourfront festival yesterday (the last for the season we think) and most of the restaurants would be closed today.

Took a long walk around the harbour and into the village centre where the pedestrian mall was busy with many of the shops open.

All very trendy but once behind the mall area there were only very run down and empty shops and buildings.

Apart from fabulous harbour front and town mall - not a lot to see.

### **Tuesday 4th September**

#### **Katwoude – Holland**

Dropped into **Kaasboerderij Simonhoeve in Katwoude - GPS N52.486580 E5.032450** which is a trendy clog and cheese factory.

It is also a gratis overnight place for Mohos but we opted not to stay here as the weather was not great and though only a 1.5km bike ride to Volendam and a further 2kms to Edam, thought it best to find somewhere closer to stay.

Saw a demonstration of cheese making and clog manufacturing which was really great and then visited the shop on the way out.

Really enjoyed the cheese tasting – they even had one named "Cannabis".

Visited Volendam and Edam - both great little towns (though extremely busy with bikers).

Didn't like any of the CPs here so moved on.

#### **Hoorn - Holland**

**Our campsite for tonight: Jachthaven De Grashaven, Hoorn - GPS N52.633930. E5.057290**

What a little gem - the CP is great and right in the yacht harbour grounds where hundreds upon hundreds of yachts lined the foreshore.

Could have spent a day or more just walking along looking at the boats but opted to head along the seafront today followed by a walk into the village.

This CP is right on the point of a peninsula in the Markermeer - a huge expanse of water, ideal for sailing.

Cobble stoned narrow streets made it difficult for cars to get around but had to watch out for the bikers.

The village square is wonderful and we did our usual trick of people watching with a half litre or two of beer.

They even have a convention and exhibition centre here on the harbour – we shuddered at the memories it brought back.

### **Wednesday 5th September**

#### **Leiden – Holland**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking, Leiden - GPS N52.159592. E4.478440**

Not the best CP we have stayed at but it gets a 10 for proximity to the heart of an amazing town.

It is a mixed parking area with an allocated space for Mohos - but right next to a road (though not busy) and beside that a train track with regular high speed electric trains doing regular runs.

Didn't interrupt our sleep though so was quiet during the evening.

They provide free shuttles right at front gate into anywhere you want to go in the city - a real bonus.

Took the shuttle into the heart of downtown where the Wednesday markets were in full swing.

Mostly fresh fruit and of course cheese, fish and other fresh items for sale.

Believe there are 28kms of canals in this town and numerous boat companies eager to take you for guided canal tours.

We opted to walk it and crossed so many canals, over quaint little bridges and along street after street of interesting apartment blocks and houses.

It amazes us that in any one street one finds it hard to see any three storey buildings that look similar - all different shapes and roof lines make for some wonderful pictures.

Stopped in the heart of downtown at a cross street for some lunch and watched thousands of bikes pass by - all heading in different directions and competing with cars and buses - "organised chaos" my driver said.

So many different types of bikes here and the most interesting are the three wheelers where there is a child cart at the front on two wheels with the third wheel at the back.

Here the children sit - some with seat belts and we had seen up to four children in one cart, some with dogs as well.

Did not see one accident or near miss - everybody just seems to know what they are doing?

The weather is still not great with constant showers throughout the day but happily staying away long enough to be able to venture out.

Loved the Molenmuseum de Valk which is a large windmill museum towering over the city and the historic 12th century Pieterskerk in the Latin Quarter - really worth a visit.

### **Thursday 6th September**

Rained throughout the night and the weather was just awful.

The road systems are great but they have to be to accommodate the number of people here.

We have found this country to be way too busy and cluttered and at times scary on the road.

### Gouda – Holland

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Klein Amerika, Gouda - GPS N52.011822. E4.715400**

The CP again is a mixed car park but quiet with an area set aside for Mohos.

This one has services for waste and water (Leiden did not) and some pitches (about 12) even have electric points (for the early birds).

Today is market day in Gouda and with the market closing at midday, we quickly put on the rain gear and walked the short few minutes into the square.

A large market with not only cheeses, meats and food stalls but lots of clothes stalls as well.

Soon got drenched so headed back to change, warm up and then try to venture out again.

Rain squalls began to clear mid afternoon so headed out again - warmer this time and armed with more rain gear.

Another great town to visit with picturesque canals and cobble stoned streets and wonderful ceramic shops.

The Town Hall is a feature of the square - originally built in 1438 and rebuilt after the great fire of 1552, it is an amazing building which now features a carillon with mechanical puppets added in 1961.

Almost directly behind the Town Hall stands the magnificent Sint Janskerk originally built in 1552 - it is the longest church at 123 metres and is really worth a visit.

After an hour or two our exploring was cut short again with rain sending us scampering back home.

### **Friday 7th September**

Travelled through more rain for most of this journey.

### Alblasserdam – Holland

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Camperpark Kinderdijk, Alblasserdam - GPS N51.859711. E4.658160**

Great CP right on the waters edge at a small marina - good facilities and only a short walk across the pedestrian bridge to the town.

Rain had cleared leaving a typical European day - dull and overcast with the wind blowing a gale.

Ventured across the pedestrian bridge into town.



Very little to see or do here but we stumbled across the audio-visual guys setting up a floating stage on the canal which would host a concert on the following evening.

Huge amount of audio was being set up so can imagine it would have been a blast.

Waited a couple of hours hoping the wind would subside - it didn't so headed off on the bikes anyway a few kms away to the windmills of Kinderdijk.

These can be reached by foot, bike or boats and are the largest number of working windmills in any one place in this country.

We have now seen many of the things Holland is most famous for - clogs, cheese, windmills and ceramics.

### **Saturday 8th September**

We had wanted to take a boat cruise to Dordrecht but the weather was unkind so opted to stay dry and warm and drive there only a few kms away.

First issue of the day - we couldn't find a CP that was suitable - the first was full (only two spaces both taken).

The second had the entrance blocked off with barriers and the third had roadworks at the turn off and everything we tried to do took us back to the roadworks.

In frustration decided to give Dordrecht a miss.

20 kms down the track of the 83 km drive to our destination there were major roadworks and closure of the freeway and not being able to read Dutch, we missed the detour instructions (apparently).

Our SatNav very kindly took us back to Dordrecht and after travelling over 50 kms did a cross country detour of another 95kms to our next CP – a very frustrating driving day.

Travelling by road in this country has not been fun.

Traffic is congested most of the day and the bikes and bikeways have been a challenge to say the least.

We are always very happy to reach our destinations and in many cases could have had a stiff drink to settle the nerves.

Even walking around presents problems with the narrow one lane roads being shared by cars, buses, pedestrians and thousands of cyclists – everything seems to have priority over vehicles.

My driver claims he has more chance of being “cleaned up” by a cyclist when walking than being “cleaned up” by a car when driving.

### **Oirschot – Holland**

### **Our campsite for tonight: Camperplaats Oirschot - GPS 51.499840. E5.321920**

Glad to get off the busy freeways for a while, we travelled down tree lined avenues to an oasis.

What a joy this place is - beautiful gardens and shrubs, peaceful and quiet and only a 10 minute walk or shorter bike ride into the village.

This is the village where Marie-Louise and Robert lived until they moved to Poland 11 years ago.

We have partial sunshine now so quickly headed out to explore.

Dropped into the tourist office in the old town hall (Oude Raadhuis) and picked up a map - "Footsteps around Oirschot" a walking tour around the village.

The walking route took us through the historical centre where all buildings cannot change their appearance and are under strict rules to keep it as a protected village.

The streets are just beautiful from the pavements, the varied tiles, the trees, the lampposts, hedges and walls.

Oirschot is a town with so much character with the renovated shop fronts and buildings keeping the look of the 1300's.

Across from the town hall is the market square which is being set up for a concert tomorrow.

Overlooking the market square is the most impressive building, Sint Petrus Basilica originally built in 1238, burnt down in 1462 and rebuilt and restored over many years.

So many quaint shops with olde wares, ceramics, candles and so much more displayed in their picture perfect windows - inspiring to say the least.

Our last stop for the day took us to Brouwerij Vandeoirsprong (Oirschot Beer Brewery) - what a remarkable old building and the busiest place in town.

The outside courtyard featured tables made out of old beer barrels and a mixture of flower baskets and every old container you could find turned the area into a cool shaded place for those rare summer days!

Inside, beer barrels of all kinds made up walls, bar areas and even the light fittings were glass beer barrels - so much interest and charm.

The place was packed and after having a couple of their own brews we had dinner - delicious three course dinner - soup, meat dish and creme brûlée - for only €10 and then waddled back home.

### **Sunday 9th September**

Headed back into the village this morning to check out the fun activities in the market square.

It is Monument Day today with lots of activities happening all around The Netherlands.

The market square was cordoned off and stalls erected.

Bit like a country fair with jumping castles for the kids and all the restaurants packed round the square listening to the jazz bands playing throughout the square.

The party finishes at 8pm tonight but we did not stay that long.

## Ittervoort – Holland

### **Our campsite for tonight: Camperplaats Ittervoort - GPS N51.175789. E5.822250**

Interim stopover before spending time in Maastricht.

Great little CP in a rural setting with all the trimmings including Internet.

Very peaceful and quiet so enjoyed just sitting, relaxing and reading in some sunshine which has been rare during our stay in The Netherlands.

Neat little town but no historic buildings but great stopover for the night.

### **Monday 10th September**

Lots of new roads which were not on our SatNav so driver and Ziggy had a few moments of anguish.

Saw an accident for the first time in a very long time.

A truck moved over a lane on the freeway but obviously did not see the little red car beside it.

Took the red car with it sideways for what seemed forever.

Happened right in front of us and I held my breath hoping the car would not roll.

Fortunately there was a paddock on the side which the car eventually got pushed into but still on four wheels - certainly takes the wind out of you for a while.

My driver sensed it was about to happen and had started braking before the two vehicles had even made contact otherwise the results could have been different.

Finally found the CP we were looking for but opted not to stay – it was too far away from the sights we wanted to see in Maastricht.

Maastricht is a massive town with only one point of interest for us to visit and explore so went straight there.

## Maastricht Underground – Holland

Bought a combined ticket to see Fort Sint Pieter and the Fort Caves and Tunnels.

Our English speaking guide Wilhelm was super and would suggest if you visit here to make sure you ask for him.

So energetic, funny, entertaining and passionate with so much knowledge to share with us which made this visit unbelievably fantastic.

The city has over 8000 underground limestone passages along a 14km long network of defence tunnels.

Artists have created charcoal paintings on the limestone walls along the way.

These tunnels run into Belgium and were used to escape from Holland during WW11.

The Fort is well preserved and parts have been restored to its 1701 appearance.

There is so much history here to see.

In summary Holland was an interesting country with many sights to see, very friendly people, but overcrowded and seemed to be about 25% more expensive than Germany when buying food, drinks and staying in Stellplatz – but certainly a must to see.

Thank you Marie-Louise and Robert for all your help.

## Luxembourg

### **Monday 17th September**

Had a great trip this morning passing through western Germany through some magic scenery - rolling green hills dotted with scattered clumps of stately forest trees and pretty villages.

Autumn is really here now and the Autumn shades through the forests are awesome.

Passed through into Luxembourg without any border checks.

Diesel is so cheap here. Best we could get in Germany was around the €1.30+ ltr mark up to around €1.47 on the highway or remote places.

Here the standard cost is €1.15 ltr and were not surprised to see around 10 stations in a row at the border and all with queues waiting to take advantage of the cost.

I believe similar huge discounts apply to cigarettes.

Decided to come in through the north of the country and found the scenery spectacular though the roads were narrow and in bad repair.

There are not many CP's in this country but nearly all are gratis.

First two we visited were beside either railway lines and/or skate board parks so moved on.

## Koerich – Luxembourg

### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking, Koerich - GPS N49.670769. E5.942500**

Travelled a long distance today and were happy to eventually find a place to stay for the night.

A small CP with only four spots but newly built and a credit to the community.

Whilst this was not on top of a railway or skate board park, the traffic was quite noisy.

Lovely little town with lots of friendly people.

### **Tuesday 18th September**

## Dudelange – Luxembourg

### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking, Dudelange - GPS N49.471619. E6.078460**

Selected this place CP as the railway line is so close making the trip into the city of Luxembourg easy.

Takes about 8 Mohos, is gratis with all water and electricity provided.

Has a couple of permanents here that take advantage of the free services and CP but they were no bother.

Directions into Luxembourg: take the steps down from the CP which leads to the platform on the left.

Go under the railway line to platform 2 and take train to Bettembourg.

From here take train to Luxembourg - again down the steps and across to platform 5.

Day ticket is €4 with free use of any train or bus for 24 hours.

There is only one station in the city which makes it easy and the information centre at the station has the city map.

This is quite a busy bustling fortress city (sometimes called the Gibraltar of the North).

The Old Town is only about 10 easy minutes walk from the station along Avenue de la Gare across the Viaduc onto F.D. Roosevelt into the city centre.

A city with numerous arched stone bridges providing views across the Alzette river with wonderfully designed colourful and picturesque gardens along the way.

The old Town flanks several large squares where the locals and tourists were in their hundreds enjoying the sun, myriads of restaurants and of course the wonderful old buildings here.

Some of the many places of interest we enjoyed included the 17th century Cathedrale Notre Dame which is open to the public at no cost; the Royal Palace (Grand Ducal Palace) built in 1573 where we watched "the changing of the guards" (not as spectacular as Buckingham Palace though) and the place we enjoyed the most was the area around Chemin de la Corniche and Rocher du Bock - Bock Casemates where we wandered across the 17th century walls of the ramparts with views across the river canyon - this is not to be missed and was the highlight to us of Luxembourg city.

We were exhausted after a full day here and ready for a well deserved rest on returning home.

Note: Do not be talked into taking a bus at any time as the train is by far the better option - long story, but call it "experience".

## France

### **Wednesday 19th September**

Decided to give France another try as we have not had great experiences in this country in the past.

Think any Aussie travelling through France should have clearly marked BIG stickers on their WoMo stating they are from Australia - the more the better.

We sit and watch as people in French Mohos look at our GB number plates and then move as far away as possible and as quickly as possible.

Brexit is a sore point here not to mention the centuries old dislike of the British.

When we make our Aussie nationality clear - the air changes - for the better.

We experience a change as soon as we cross the border - no border checks again.

The French countryside is really beautiful but once you hit the towns, most are woeful and depressing and have done little or nothing to create pride in their towns or homes - no repairs or paint for a very long time!

Our first stop was to visit the Citadelle Montmedy but were turned back half way up the hill and advised it had closed in August for refurbishment - not sure when it will reopen.

Had to back down the hill as there was no opportunity to do a several point turn - ugh!

Next we found the prettiest little CP ever. **Parking Quncy-Landzecourt GPS N49.494961 E5.300020.**

It only holds four Mohos but the setting is beautiful - just at the edge of the village, colourful flower pots line the bridge at the entry and each pitch is divided by shrubs and flower pots.

The outlook is across green pastures and a stream.

There are no services here (we don't need them anyhow).

The village is very small with no shops, only a few houses and farms but all of these were well looked after and a credit to this small place.

My driver opted to move on.

Should have stayed here as the next few options were not good and we seemed to drive forever until we arrived here.

### **Louppy sur Loison – France**

**Our campsite for tonight: Aire de camping-car, Lavoir du Bourget, Louppy sur Loison - GPS 49.442310 E5.349570**

This was smaller again with only two gravel pitches but we had the most magnificent view across to the Renaissance Castle and church on one side and green pastures across the valley on the other side - no services here.

Very small village so only took an hour to explore before the night set in.

### **Thursday 20th September**

A great day travelling today with this CP certainly being off the beaten track taking us though some magic rural countryside.

### **Lachausse – France**

**Our campsite for tonight: domaine du Vieux Moulin, Lachausse - GPS 49.0355530. E5.817170**

The CP is again gratis with no services.

It is behind a restaurant, a local produce store and a working farm which is serviced by the handicapped.

Takes only about 5 Mohos but there was a selfish French Moho with trailer and motorbike who parked sideways to the water view which left little or no room for anyone else.

We fortunately were able to squeeze in and had a beautiful view across the huge tranquil lake where fishermen sat and sat and sat for hours without a bite.

Ventured into the restaurant for some lunch but no one spoke anything but French and the menu was in French only (surprise surprise).

Eager to support the farm and the handicapped people, we stayed for lunch.

Using google translate on an Ipad and showing it to the waitress, we ordered one meal to share and two drinks.

Ended up with two meals instead but given the language problem, opted to grin and bear it.

Walked around the farm where there were hundreds of chickens and other weird looking fowls in outside coups and then ventured into the small village.

The CP setting was really special so we sat and watched the most glorious sunset across the lake.

### **Friday 21st & Saturday 22nd September**

#### **Pont-a-Mousson – France**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Pont de Plaisance, Pont-a-Mousson - GPS N48.902939. E6.061160**

Had two wonderful days here.

The CP is right on the town's edge with the Moselle lapping at the front door.

There are two parts, the first being right on the river with the second part on the marina.

We chose the marina as there were only four pitches near the marina office that got internet.

All services here with great showers and WC facility and one gratis washing machine and dryer.

Couldn't believe my luck to get one load in before the CP filled up, then there was a queue of baskets lined up in no time.

Internet is provided for one device only and each day you have to queue up to get a new code. (French customer service?)

The Gothic Eglise Saint Martin built at the beginning of the 16th century is the main attraction in the town and stands tall at the end of the bridge that leads to town.

Major refurbishments of the internal statues were underway but we were lucky enough to gain entrance.

Great town to explore with bikeways running along both sides of the Moselle.

Too cold for this little duck to bike it, so we walked forever.

Saturday mornings, there is a local produce market in town until midday.

### **Sunday 23rd September**

Miserable wet cold day today so not much fun travelling today.

### **Hombourg-Haut – France**

**Our campsite for one night: Aire de Camping-Car, Hombourg-Haut - GPS N49.123890. E6.778720**

This CP is set on a mixed parking area adjacent to a soccer field.

No cost to park and any services required are at a small cost.

Well laid out large pitches with a grass break between each.

There is also a Netto supermarket next door.

Nothing is open today and the rain showers continued throughout the day.

Mid afternoon the cars started to pile in to the soccer ground car park next door and soon the carpark was full.

Couldn't believe they would play today but they did and as the squalls became heavier and the wind got stronger, we were not surprised they didn't finish the game and headed for the shelter of the stands.

Some very cold and miserable players and spectators left the ground later in the afternoon - our entertainment for the day.

### **Monday 24th September**

### **Bitche – France**

**Our campsite for one night: Aire de Camping-Car, Bitche - GPS N49.054409 E7.433860**

This was a great find and so very interesting. A must to visit.

The CP is set in the parking area for the Citadelle de Bitche.

Separate area dedicated for six Mohos with full services again gratis with a fee for water and electricity if needed.

The Citadelle sits high on a plateau with panoramic views across to the North Vosges Mountains.

The Citadelle tour cost is €10 pp and is worth every cent.

You receive headphones which leads you through the inside of the Citadelle to 13 stations where stages of the film "Men in War of 1870" are projected onto different surfaces.

It talks of the war between the Prussians and the French (another French loss) and the fight to save the Citadelle from occupation.



Several museums have been set up within the Citadelle and are very interesting.

The views are amazing from the rampart walls.

It is a short walk downhill to the City of Bitch to the Garden of Peace.

The gardens and vegetal creations are throughout the city centre and make for a pleasurable walk.

## Germany

### **Tuesday 25th & Wednesday 26th September**

Across the border again with no border checks.

#### **Hornbach – Germany**

#### **Our campsite for 2 Nights: An Der Pirminiusshalle, Hornbach - N49.183819. E7.365600**

We rate this little CP with a 10 - it is just so well organised and designed by a Moho owner - very obvious as everything you need is here and is so well done.

A really beautiful treed setting and peaceful and quiet.

There is a small sports ground beside the CP which provides several boules lanes, a mini golf course, table tennis, snooker and a small soccer field - all equipment is supplied to play these games and is gratis and included in the tariff (though you can make a donation).

We spent a few really enjoyable hours in there and sad to say the driver outshone the navigator in every game we played.

The CP hut includes a big covered area with tables and chairs and loads of tourist information.

Beside the hut is a fire pit with seats around it.

Timber can be purchased from the supermarket.

Wifi was great on one day but a bit iffy on day two.

There are several great walks in the area and the first was to explore the historic town only 15 minutes walk away.

The old church was built in 1573 and is currently being refurbished while the monastery's (Kloster) interior has been converted to a five star + hotel where we enjoyed a pint served in their own beer stein, in the sunny beer garden.

### **Thursday & Friday 27th & 28th September**

Reluctantly we left here, could definitely have stayed on longer as there are so many walks here and it was so beautiful.

#### **Zweibrücken – Germany**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Freizeitpark Zweibrücken Wohnmobil, Zweibrücken - GPS N49.253639. E7.376230**

This small town (town of roses and horses) has a proud history despite its nearly complete destruction in 1945 during WW2.

The town was declared derelict by the Americans and plans were to abandon any consideration of rebuilding.

The locals got together and held a compulsory lottery, the funds went to the rebuilding of the town and some old buildings were rebuilt to the original specifications including Alexander church, Karlskirche and the Castle.

From the CP you walk along tree lined pedestrian avenues to the Rosegarten - beautiful gardens that are open all year round, though sadly the rose season ends in September, but still a few there now and lots of other blooms and gardens.

The town's sporting facilities are fantastic and we passed by many sporting fields and equestrian centres where horses were being groomed and put through their paces.

The CP again is really well done with excellent bathroom facilities and showers included in the tariff that have no time limit and loads of hot water.

Washer and dryer at €2 a load - took advantage of that and excellent wifi to boot.

Beside the CP was a beer garden and restaurant where we spent both afternoons in the sunshine with the locals.

A great Stellplatz though the €50 deposit for the bathrooms was a bit daunting (key was well looked after).

### **Saturday 29th September**

#### **[Weiskirchen – Germany](#)**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Wohnmobil-Oase Schwarzindersee, Weiskirchen - GPS N49.527168. E6.831630**

Unusual place this which is nowhere near a town but included as part of a hotel and resort.

The CP setting was natural bushland bordering a small lake where there were lots of beautiful nature walks.

Wifi was excellent and you could use the facilities of the hotel when it was open.

One section included the most unusual cabins looking like large oak wine barrels - separate barrels for each room i.e. one barrel on its side was the bedroom and beside it, the bathroom - all on a small deck with a couple of deck chairs.

If you wanted a two bedroom, then you got another barrel.

The setting was in a vineyard with the grape vines separating the units.

### **Sunday - Friday 30th September - 4th October**

#### **[Oberbrombach - Germany](#)**

#### **Hohenblick, Oberbrombach - GPS N49.694721. E7.259440**

This place is just magic.

Very private on the outskirts of a small village.

It is high on a hill with views forever with several grassed terraces and large pitches.

Wifi is excellent and the property has several rustic timber huts where tables and chairs, a fireplace (with timber) and the most unusual western artefacts create a wonderful ranch style atmosphere.

There are so many nature walks from here where great tracks take you through forests where quite often the tree canopy is so dense you cannot see the sky.

No sounds of life in any direction with just us, the trees and the birds - thank goodness it is well signposted.

Something we soon realised is that being on top of the hill, all walks go downhill first and then the inevitable - the walk back is all uphill.

Took a few of these walks with the smallest being 5.5kms and each time, the uphill took a lot longer 😊

The days have been very cool with overnights at around 3 degrees so walking has been a real joy.

Nights are spent around the fire pit where the owner puts on a great fire where the conversation becomes more lively once the moonshine comes out.

It amazes us that everyone seems to have that bottle of clear liquid in their alcohol stocks and are really keen for novices like us to share it.

The owner puts on the occasional BBQ grill where he cooks outside for the campers - only does this when there are enough numbers, and produces the biggest, fattest and juiciest piece of meat we have had since leaving home.

This comes with cooked potato and you bring your own plates and cutlery, bread, salad etc.

Total cost €5 each and the rustic beer garden is large enough to house a large group.

Had a real hoot on one evening but as the Germans began speaking faster and faster and with different dialects, we lost some of the communication.

So many times in our travels we have come across people who really would love to come to Australia but think it is really dangerous with the number of deadly animals and sea life we have here.

Evidently several documentaries shown overseas portray this.

The Australian tourism bureau really needs to lift its game here as Australia's image to overseas travellers is really scary.

A really special peaceful place for those that enjoy a rural, rustic, unique and interesting environment.

All services here including wifi with electricity and water at a small cost and camping with the panoramic views only €7 per night.

Loved the meat so much have requested the butcher for some of the same to take with us.

Well done Hohenblick - your property and staff have been 10 star plus.

### **Friday 5th - Sunday 14th October**

### **Stelzenberg (Near Kaiserslautern) – Germany**

### **With friends Martina and Ralf at their home in Stelzenberg Germany**

Sunny skies and fantastic warm October weather for the whole stay here which gave us the opportunity of spending lots of time detailing Ziggy both inside and outside.

She is more than sparkling now and we are sad to think that it is only six weeks before we head home.

Ziggy has been our home for such a long time now, it is hard to imagine not having her as part of our life in Australia.

Ralf is a real whiz with motorhomes and he installed a new micro-switch in one of the taps, adjusted the sun awning arms, renewed the waterproofing membrane on one of the skylights which was looking a little tired and made all of his equipment available for us to detail Ziggy – much appreciated Ralf.

We had such a fantastic time with our friends and their family and did so many things it is hard to remember them all.

Martina's mum and dad Christal and Emile are singers as part of a 40 strong choir in Kaiserslautern and we were lucky enough to be invited to their Schubert concert which also featured many great movie films such as Lion King, Aladdin and Phantom of the Opera to name just a few.

Accompanied by professional operatic soprano, baritone and piano player, the two and a half hour concert was just wonderful.

We celebrated a 50th birthday with Ralf's sister with her family and friends in a cafe several kms away and they welcomed us with open arms.

Spent many hours talking about Australia with a few of their friends who had visited Australia previously and others who want to go.

Had a wonderful afternoon tea with Martina's sister, brother, mum and dad and enjoyed cakes you can only dream of and the best home-made apple crumble pie (made by Cornelia - Martina's sister) - yum - had to have two slices of this one.

Went on some wonderful hikes through the Pfalzwald with Martina, Ralf and their friend Petra and enjoyed the panoramic view at the top at the Hohe Loog Haus with a wonderful traditional German late lunch/dinner.

The road on the way to the departure point was a little testing – it is called Totenkopf Strasse which roughly translated means Deadhead road and there are many traffic accidents on this road,

Our last day and also our wedding anniversary (our second in Germany) was spent in Neustadt an der-Weinstrasse on the last day of the two week wine festival where more than 110 floats paraded through the streets.

Mostly pulled by tractors, beautiful horses, vintage cars and some man power, the floats carried wine princesses from all the wine regions in the area.

Wine flowed freely and helpers with the floats were eager to fill up any glasses you had in hand.

Several bands in full colourful German costume passed by and created a wonderful atmosphere.

Back in the town centre, Ferris wheels and other rides were in full swing and every spare spot was taken up with food and drink outlets - spent a whole afternoon here - just fantastic.

We have made wonderful friends in Martina and Ralf whose hospitality, friendship, companionship and help over this week with Ziggy have left us so sad to part company with them and their wonderful friends and family.

Ralf and Martina are going to try to come and stay with us in Tweed Heads in March next year and our Polish relatives from Biala Podlaska will be staying with us in August/September and we hope to be able to show them all some Aussie hospitality.

Ralf and Martina are also keen for us to return to Germany so we can go touring in our motorhomes together again – maybe Ziggy goes back into storage over winter??? – something to chat about in the evenings to come.

### **Monday 15th & Tuesday 16th October**

#### **[Bad Sobernheim – Germany](#)**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Am Nohfels, Bad Sobernheim - GPS N49.778881. E7.658640**

After a large shop at our favourite Lidl store, in Kaiserslautern, we travelled through a colourful countryside with Autumn now in full swing.

We passed along many roads where both sides of the road were showering autumn leaves creating a carpet of orange, red, brown and green - so pretty.

We just love the Autumn tones but can imagine it being a nightmare to clean up the tons of leaves everywhere.

The campsite is set in such a colourful Autumn setting with apple and nut trees scattered throughout the campsite.

Hedges are well groomed and everything is perfect here. The small cafe adjacent attracts lots of visitors and campers and overlooks a small river.

Several walks and bike ways lead in every direction.

Walked to the village only 10 minutes away where there are loads of shops, cafes, old churches, quaint buildings and of course a small town square where we enjoyed a quiet ale.

The walk/bikeway in front of the cafe led along a treed avenue to the Barfusspfad which is a local attraction where you take your shoes off and walk barefoot across the river to the other side with the aid of ropes.

There is also a suspension bridge though dismantled at present so only way across was through the river.

Really worth the effort though a little chilly in the water now.

They have a local tree artist who has carved fantastic animals out of logs and these are right beside the cafe.

### **Wednesday 17th October**

#### **St Aldegund – Germany**

**Our campsite for tonight: Moselufer, St Aldegund - GPS N50.080662. E7.131390**

We have decided as we now only have a little more than a month before heading home that we revisit some of our favourite places on the Moselle.

This is a great winter spot as not many pitches offer shade as we found out on our last visit in summer.

Bikeways run along the front of the campground and all pitches have magic waterfront views with a small but lovely village.

### **Thursday - Sunday 18th - 21st October**

#### **Reil – Germany**

**Our campsite for 4 nights: Moselufer Reil - GPS N50.026272. E7.114530**

One of our favourite places again right on the Moselle where barges and river cruise boats meander past every few minutes.

One of the prettiest and safest bikeways we have ventured on which travel through the vineyards past old stone bridges and a castle to boot.

A little tractor towing a wagon that takes about 10 tourists shares this bikeway and leaves little room to get past.

So many little villages to pass through along the way makes this place a must to stop at and do several biking adventures.

The Village is set on a hillside and surrounded by grapevines.

So many winemakers here in the village and wine sampling is a must.

Spent many days here and had such a wonderful time.

The campsite has a small waterfront Imbiss (cafe) where the campers and locals gather throughout the day and night for food and drink.

The Imbiss closed for the season on Friday night and the big finale was the BBQ with outside bonfire which attracted a huge number of people who partied on until the wee hours of the morning.

Beers were €1 and wine €2 so there were a lot of untidy people.

Last look at our watch was after midnight so time to leave the party animals and indulge in some beauty sleep.

## **Monday - Tuesday 22nd & 23rd October**

### **Kinheim – Germany**

**Our campsite for two nights: Wohnmobilplatz, Kinheim - GPS N49.972141. E7.057040**

Haven't been here before and guess we avoided it when here in summer - no trees here at all but lovely and sunny with the wonderful Moselle/vineyard views forever.

Not a lot in the village but lots of interesting heritage buildings and a waterfront hotel which was very popular particular with bus groups.

The morning ritual here is a bit daunting with the church bells peeling at 8am, the campsite fuhrer arriving in his tractor at 8.10 am to collect the camp fee and the baker sounding his horn at 8.15 am.

Given the temperatures in the morning are single digits and it is still relatively dark at 8am, there were not a lot of happy campers at this time of morning.

Got to say the campsite fuhrer was not the friendliest.

Lots of little veggie plots border the campsite where veggies grow and the walnut tree on the border of the plots was dropping nuts in abundance.

Lots of campers out with their bags gathering up the nutty pickings.

Great little Stellplatz but the 8am forced start is the only negative.

## **Wednesday & Thursday 24th & 25th October**

### **Traben-Trarbach – Germany**

**Our campsite for two nights: Moselstellplatz, Traben-Trarbach - GPS N49.957180. E7.104980**

Couldn't get in here during the summer months as it was packed out but this time round we won the lottery and got the best spot right on the waterfront with only the bikeway between us and the Moselle - no campers either side as well - just wonderful!

Can understand now why this spot is so popular - our 20 minute walk along the bikeway riverfront track led us into one of the prettiest towns we have visited.

The double city is on opposite sides of the river and after spending two days here, not sure which side is the best. Traben is the oldest with records dating back to 820 and Trarbach 1142.

The architecture is spectacular on both sides with many old churches, cathedrals and buildings renovated back to their previous glory. Spent the whole day exploring one side then the other and had to pinch ourselves as we walked through a wonderland - street after street of awe inspiring architecture.

The main tourist attraction is the Bruckentor (Bridge Gate) on the Trarbach side which is a three storey entry structure on the bridge leading to the Traben side.

Looks like a small castle and is now a wine tavern on the second and third level.



On day one, we saw from the town, the ruins of Grevenburg Castle high on the hill and day two we took the challenge and climbed the mountainside to the top.

Only a few kms uphill, but all the way up a steep hillside left us breathless at the top.

So worth the effort as the 360 degree views over the Moselle, Traben and hillside vineyards were amazing.

There is a cafe right at the top (a road from the other side of the mountain leads to the ruins).

It was the old commandants quarters refurbished to a rustic cafe with an open fireplace, where we enjoyed a beverage before taking the steep descent back down to the twin towns.

Definitely worth a visit to see these twin towns and the Stellplatz was great but very popular even now out of season - it was full by lunchtime.

### **Friday & Saturday 26th & 27th October**

#### **Trier – Germany**

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Reisemobilpark Treviris, Trier - GPS N49.750189. E6.624440**

The Stellplatz itself is on the Moselle about 3kms from the Old Town.

No real views as such as the fence and shrubs on the border, block out most of the view.

It is well laid out and the best spot to camp because of its proximity to the Old Town.

A nearby regular bus service runs from Monday to Friday but not on weekends.

We arrived late on Friday and still tired from our long treks in Traben-Trarbach yesterday opted to rest and take the challenge in the morning.

It is really cold now with this morning's temp at 3 degrees with a high of 7 predicted so on with the coats, scarves, gloves and backpacks, we walked the 3 kms along the river, over the Romerbrücke (Roman Bridge) (2nd century) and soon found the Old Town.

Trier is Germany's oldest city (over 2000 years) with seven Roman UNESCO heritage sites in the city centre to explore.

Wow, wow and double wow - what a fabulous Old Town where there is street after street of pedestrian only zones and with a mapped tourist trail to go by, made the exploring without missing anything so easy.

So much to see it took the whole day just walking and enjoying every moment. Some of the most memorable for us were:

1. Porta Nigra is the world's best preserved Roman city gate (170 AD) the town's landmark. Set in the heart of Old Town in the main square, it stands tall and ominous amongst the newer buildings.
2. Konstantin Basilica (4th Century)



3. Kaiserthermen Imperial Baths (4th century) currently being renovated but many parts still visible.

4. Dom St. Peter (4th century) - just amazing.

5. Liebfrauen Basilica (13th century) and joins the Dom.

Were a little disappointed with the Amphitheater (100 AD) as it was a long walk out of town and though some of the original gates in the lower level still stand, would not recommend this as we have seen some in Greece that were much better.

Stopped in the main square for a hot gluhwein and watched some locals joining in for a display of how "The Macarana" is done German Style.

A truly wonderful day ending with a brisk walk home and then "feet up" in front of the heater for the rest of the day.

### **Sunday 28th - Wednesday 31st October**

#### **Pronsfeld – Germany**

**Our campsite for 4 nights: am Alten Bahnhof, Pronsfeld - GPS N50.163010. E6.336810**

Wow - is it getting cold now. Martina and Ralf from Stelzenberg Germany warned us that come 1st November when the Autumn rains begin, the trees lose their remaining leaves and you say goodbye to summer, the sun and any hope of any warmth until March the following year.

The cold came four days early this year as here we experienced cold, rain, sleet and snow in the 4 days here.

The temperature during the day did not climb above 7 and the minimum on one day, even in the middle of the days was -2 degrees.

We sat in Ziggy for most of the 4 days and enjoyed the warmth of the gas heating and the wonderful strong internet speeds here.

Great little Stellplatz with everything you need and only a few minutes walk to the village.

The camping fuhrer comes morning and night to collect the camping fee.

Lots of lovely trees (now in full Autumn shades) border the camping area.

Met a great Belgish couple who gave us some tips on places to visit in Belgium.

They said there are not many camping places and most are overcrowded, hence they holiday in Germany.

Advice from them was not to allow too much time in Belgium before going home.

Think without the internet we would have gone stir crazy as we spent many hours enjoying our movies and U Tube, sport and world news while the snow came tumbling down outside.

So pretty to watch through our picture windows but certainly kept us indoors most of the time.

Took the opportunity on the last day to do a walk through the village but not without coats, gloves, scarves and many layers.

The old railway cars at the railway station were quite interesting, but there is little else apart from cycling (not today for this little navigator though) and Nordic walking with lots of walking tracks to choose from.

Only lasted about an hour and a bit before the sleet came in and we retired back to our warm little cocoon.

### **Thursday 1st November**

#### **Hellenthal – Germany**

**Our campsite for tonight: Grenzlandhalle, Hellenthal - GPS N50.492409. E6.380760**

Travelled through more rain again today and struggled to keep the Windows from fogging up.

Has taken us a while to learn how to do this successfully but now it's a breeze using the air conditioning in conjunction with the demister - no problem at all.

We are only travelling short distances in this weather and really appreciated getting to this great little camp spot only a short distance away.

We are just on the outskirts of a very pretty little town with lots of great restaurants.

This Stellplatz is gratis and does not have any services but is a very quiet and restful spot.

Drizzled for most of our stay here so after a short time exploring this neat little town, we retired to back to Ziggy.

### **Friday 2nd November**

Hard to believe we are coming home at the end of this month after more than 21 months away.

We are getting really very sad now and often there are several quiet moments when we are travelling where both of us are feeling the pain and knowing our holiday is coming to an end.

We have booked the Chunnel crossing between Calais and Folkestone back to the UK on 17th November to enable time for registration, detailing and habitation check and neither of us are looking forward to leaving Europe.

Ziggy has been just wonderful and while we have two interested parties waiting to meet her, I for one will not be disappointed if they do not fall in love with her.

If no sale eventuates, we are considering storing her somewhere in the UK with a possible trip back for a while next year sometime - now the thought of that makes us happy!

#### **Rurberg – Germany**

**Our campsite for tonight: Reisemobilhafen, Rurberg - GPS - N50.605770. E6.380760**

Rain has stopped for the moment but it is still really cold.

We watch as the locals walk by in their heavy coats, layers, hats and gloves and wonder how they can stand this type of weather for so many months of the year.

So many places are now beginning to close for the season and we really appreciate that back home, nothing closes ever for any part of the year.

This is a great campsite right on the border of the village with only a short little walk to the massive lake which now only has a few boats moored, whereas a couple of months ago, sailing and small cruise boats happily cruised back and forth - what a difference a few weeks make.

Really great information centre and a pretty village with lovely homes scattered up the hillsides around the lake.

Lots of hotels and restaurants on the waterfront but only a few remain open.

Quite happy to be able to take a really long walk today as the weather has improved (still no sign of sunshine - has been nearly a week now).

The walks (and bike ways if you are brave enough) took us across the dam wall and around the lake which is stunning.

Temperature overnight was -3 and woke up to thick frost on the grass.

Even have a patch of sunshine this morning so hope it remains for a while.

My driver hasn't had the opportunity of taking many photos over the last week or so - the weather has been so awful and the navigator has not had much to write home about for the same reason.

We have decided to head for Calais through Belgium so we don't have to pass through France but will eventually have to cross in to France to get to the Chunnel crossing.

We are very sad about leaving Germany as we have had such a good time here – the country, people, food, beer and everything else have been really great.

It also makes such a difference when we have been able to understand what the locals are saying and they can understand us as well.

Important that you have plenty of cash at all times (same in many European countries) as credit cards are not accepted in many businesses with the exception of supermarkets and service stations.

Be aware of the “pay to pee” concept in Germany – when you can find a public toilet (öffentliche toilette) there is a fee to pay on exiting the toilet.

We were surprised that this system was also in places like McDonalds and in some restaurants and bars.

The Driver was caught out a couple of times as he usually wanders around without any money at all as I am the one who carries the money, passports etc.

The other unusual concept for us was the deposit or “pfand” system whereby a deposit is paid on all drink type purchases both at supermarkets and in some restaurants and bars.

The supermarkets have automatic machines where you can deposit your empty bottles and receive a docket which can be offset against future purchases in the store.

Sometimes the deposit is more than the value of the drink ie 19 Euro cents for a bottle of water and 25Euro cents for the deposit

The most confusing situation we experienced was at a restaurant/bar at the Deutsches Ecke at the junction of the Moselle and Rhein rivers – we went to the bar to order 2 beers and were told we had to go to another section to pay a deposit for the glasses – 2 Euros each glass.

We did that and then returned to the bar and ordered the 2 beers which were then placed on the counter top – we went to pay but was told we had to go to another section to pay.

We consumed the beers and then went back to the bar to have the glasses deposit refunded but was told we had to go to another section to have the deposit refunded.

Just as well we could understand the signage (and there was sign pollution) or we could have been there for ever.

In many places staff are not allowed to handle cash – only the owner or manager handles the cash.

## Belgium

### Saturday 3rd November & Sunday 4th November

#### [Jalhay – Belgium](#)

#### **Our campsite for two nights: Parking Barrage de la Gileppe, Jalhay - GPS N50.587570. E5.969600**

We could not find new places now in this part of Germany as we have been through this area before, so decided to bite the bullet and head across the border into Belgium.

No border checks at all so entry into Belgium again was seamless.

A much nicer day today with no rain so really enjoyed the drive through the Autumn drenched forests and hillsides - awesome - so spectacular!

This is a gratis Stellplatz which has dedicated spots for 4 motorhomes only and 4 electric points at no cost.

Have not seen this very often in our travels - we were lucky enough to get the last spot.

This place is really popular and so busy with the car park and all adjoining streets full by lunchtime - set on a huge lake with cycle and walking tracks for miles.

High on the hill overlooking the dam, there is a structure that is three storeys high with a restaurant at the top - from the top there are 360 degree panoramic views.

The dam wall is massive and the centre span includes a 20 metre high statue of Leopold the Lion who guards the water and valleys.

The walk across the dam walls is really spectacular and today with the weather being a little better, the locals really came out to enjoy this.

Day two came with not a cloud to be seen.

The carpark filled very quickly and by 10am cars were double and triple parked with no spots anywhere and once any Moho vacated, cars quickly took their places with eventually Ziggy sitting all alone surrounded by cars.

Took the opportunity of such a beautiful (but still really cold day) to do one of the many long walks so once across the dam walls we walked through the reservoir forest and along the lake.

Couples, families all with man's best friend in tow (can't believe how important dogs are to Europeans) were everywhere walking and cycling and enjoying probably one of the last sunny days left this year (hope not).

The views across the lake were stunning and again the trees in full Autumn colours now drenched with sunlight were spectacular - autumn in Europe is really special.

Several hours later we returned and enjoyed a hot chocolate (for the navigator) and one of our favourite beers - Jupiler (for the driver) at the lakefront restaurant.

### **Monday 5th November**

#### **[Blegny – Belgium](#)**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Begny-Mine, Blegny - GPS N50.686138. E5.723820**

A UNESCO world heritage site, this mine was really interesting.

It is out of season now so only option of viewing the mine was to go with a tour group of Dutch retirees with a Dutch guide but with the aid of English audio headsets.

Super information through audio but really missed the jokes the guide was sharing with the group.

Well worth a visit if in the area.

The mine closed several years ago but is a top attraction in the area.

While we were there several busloads of kids, teenagers and old folk like us took group tours.

Great location to just stop and take in the surroundings with playgrounds for the kids, an open air museum and an animal park for the little ones (which the navigator also enjoyed).

The brasserie was also well utilised by the groups and Moho owners.

About a 15 minute walk into town where there was little life to be seen and the church being the only point of interest worth photographing.

The Stellplatz itself was great and very peaceful once the gates closed in the evening. Great complimentary facilities including water and use of the mines restroom during the day.

### **Tuesday 6th November**

#### **Herk de Stad – Belgium**

**Our campsite for tonight: Park Olmental, Herk de Stad - GPS N50.934059. E5.166150**

Beautiful setting in a wonderful park with water fountains, a picturesque lake (where fishermen sat for hours on end) and caught nothing and a beaver pond.

We went in search of the beaver but this part of the lake had dried up and the beavers were long gone.

Great little town with heaps of shops with very expensive clothing in shop windows - the price was enough to scare me away - but did lots of window shopping.

Again a gratis site with a very new WC block where men and women went through the same door and the wash basin was right next to the urinal - so pleased the navigator did not strike anyone of the opposite sex while visiting!

### **Wednesday 7th November**

#### **Aarschott – Belgium**

**Our campsite for tonight: Parking Demervallei, Aarschott - GPS N50.984921. E4.840760**

Really worth visiting here. A really trendy, funky town with a waterway running through the middle of it.

We arrived late so by the time we hit the town, it was getting dark so could not take pictures.

Very pretty walk in the evening with the cathedral well lit up and the streets now with Xmas trimmings was delightful.

Dropped into a trendy little bar where we had to choose from about a hundred different types of beers.

Woke up to a glorious sunny cloudless day so armed with camera headed back into town to find the photo opportunities we missed last night.

Market day today prevented us from getting photos of the uniquely Belgish town square which was a little disappointing.

Just had to visit the cathedral (just love visiting these) and were rewarded with an exhibition gallery of photos of Armistice Day back in 1918.

The town is gearing up for celebrations for the coming weekend which is the 100th anniversary.

We are keen to be part of these celebrations and wonder where we will be on the 11<sup>th</sup> – Ypres maybe?.

Great complimentary Stellplatz again with electricity included.

### **Thursday 8th November**

Sadly left just after lunch after deliberating for some time about staying here until Sunday - Armistice Day.

Still so much of Belgium to see and now only days left before we head across the channel.

With only 75 kms to our next stop, no more than an hour on the motorway my driver said, took us nearly three hours with delays and detours that took us round and round with seemingly no way to get past them - very frustrating!

### **Lennik – Belgium**

#### **Our campsite for tonight: Parking Lennik - GPS N50.807800. E4.163050**

Arrived as the sun disappeared but were happy to get the remaining spot (only 4 here but really pretty setting).

No walks tonight but hopefully in the morning.

### **Friday 9th November**

#### **Ypres (Ieper) Belgium**

Had a big sleep in this morning and didn't surface until after 9.30 am.

With the days getting shorter and shorter there is very little light before 8am now and together with our wonderful silver thermal screens that keep out light and cold (and heat) we sleep longer here than in our sunny bright light and airy apartment at home.

Didn't venture into town this morning and decided to head to Ypres ASAP to try to secure a spot in the main Moho park until Sunday for the 100 year Armistice Commemorations in Ypres at the Menin Gate.

Not much luck here or at the other two in the area - all booked out (heard that the main Stellplatz has been booked out for 2 years for this weekend) and queues waiting at the gates to move in once a Moho vacated.

Many of the parking areas in town normally open to day trippers were closed from Saturday until Monday - ugh!!!

We had driven through the town on the way to the campsites and the town was truly alive and buzzing.

Thousands of people and cars everywhere so can imagine what it will be like by Sunday.

Drove out of town a couple of kms and parked on the roadside.

Waited until 4pm and then walked into town to enjoy the evenings festivities.

What a magic town with wonderful architecture, particularly the Flanders Museum and the square around it.

Walked to the Menin Gate where a field of poppies has been laid by the many visitors who have come here for these commemorations.

Like a massive red carpet in a sea of green - all the walls on both sides of the road of the massive gate were etched with names of the lost Commonwealth soldiers with no graves (54,000 of them) in that terrible war.

We were here to be part of the Last Post bugle ceremony which is at 8pm every day and has been sounded every day since 1928 - hail rain or shine.

Every restaurant and bar was full with an unbelievable atmosphere of camaraderie of all Commonwealth countries.

We sat in a bar about 30 metres from the Menin Gate that was full of Brits, Aussies, Canadians and many others where shoulder to shoulder they enjoyed a beer or two or three or more while waiting for 8pm.

We spoke to a Brit who has been coming here every year for over 30 years and had so much knowledge – he was a very interesting guy.

By 7.30 pm the streets were packed a hundred deep in front of both sides of the Menin Gate and that was before everyone left the bars for the Last Post.

So much noise as everyone chatted and waited - then complete silence as 4 buglers marched toward the gate, stood in the middle of the road facing the Gate and began the Last Post.

So moving as the tears rolled down the faces of so many around us (and us) .

This was followed by Scottish bagpipers who played the Scottish tune that they played when “going over the top” followed by Amazing Grace.

We couldn't see much from our position in the crowd but captured the buglers and pipers on film, at least the audio anyhow.

A memory that will stay with us forever.

The bars and restaurants again filled up so headed the 2kms back to Ziggy.

Were not happy about staying on the busy roadside overnight as it was a main road with trucks and tractors passing by within inches so were very relieved to find Ziggy still in tact.

Parked in a nearby carpark next to a large shopping complex and were joined by several other Mohos before morning.

Had a very peaceful and quiet night which I am sure we would not have had on the main road.

### **Saturday 10th November & Sunday 11th November 2018**

Rainy this morning so hope it clears by Sunday.

Only 7 days left before the Chunnel Crossing - so so sad 😞😞.

We passed through many towns where it was the same, people everywhere so headed to the countryside on our way to Brugge, Belgium.

It was a year ago when we came through here and spent many days looking at all the World War 1 memorial sites and monuments in this part of the world.



## Wingene – Belgium

**Our campsite for two nights: Smart-ijs, Wingene – GPS N51.073769. E3.265150**

What a gem this place is - set in the country, there are only 6 places here with green pastures, braying donkeys next door and a restaurant and ice cafe on site.

Pretty as a picture setting and so quiet compared to where we have just been.

For €8 you get water, electricity and hi speed wifi.

The guys who run this place are super friendly, speak excellent English and deserve to do well.

The rain stopped us from doing little else apart from reading and enjoying the tranquil and picturesque setting.

**Monday 12th November 2018**

## Brugge – Belgium

**Our campsite for tonight: Parking Kanaaleiland, Brugge – GPS N51.195671. E3.226380**

Brugge is the capital and largest city of West Flanders in Belgium and has a population of around 118,000 and is sometimes referred to as the "Venice of the North" because of the canal networks.

You do not need a tourist guide or tour map in Brugge – just simply walk around the streets and take in the many fantastic sights.

Sights not to miss include the 83 metre high Belfry and Market Square, the 14<sup>th</sup> century City Hall, the Groeninge Museum, Saint John's Hospital, to name just a few.

All the sights were within a short walk from our camping place which has around 55 camping places and is 19 Euros off season or 25 Euros in season.

The city has many Belgian chocolate and waffle shops.

**Tuesday 13th November 2018**

## Torhout – Belgium

**Our campsite for tonight: Torhout - GPS N51.077648. E3.061490**

Belgium was invaded by the German army in May 1940 and on 25 May 1940 Torhout was bombarded by the Luftwaffe, with fire bombs resulting in the destruction of the church as well as some nearby houses.

The City Hall was unharmed even though it was only located some 50 meters from the church.

On that same day the King of Belgium was just a mile or two away in the Castle of Wijnendale together with the Prime Minister and three other ministers.

It was there that the king would sign the capitulation of Belgium.

Torhout was bombed again on 26 May, 27 May and 13 August, which damaged the hospital and some schools.

Torhout was occupied for 4 years before Canadian troops liberated the city on 6 and 7 September 1944.

It was also during the occupation that the City Hall was classified as a monument on 29 November 1943.

We camped overnight in the parking area for the Castle of Wijnendale – free of charge – only facilities were rubbish bins – had a quiet night.

There are still a few items of interest left over from World War 1 near the Castle.

## France

### Wednesday 14th November

#### [Ekelsbeke – France](#)

**Our campsite for tonight: Aire de camping car, Ekelsbeke – GPS N50.883911. E2.431360**

Ekelsbeke was a free camp spot with 7 places only 250 metres from the centre of the village.

The facilities included free grey and black water disposal and a rest room.

Water and electricity were available for 3 Euros each.

They were gearing up for a festival and the local people were very friendly and helpful.

#### **Ziggy Sold** 🤖

Mike Steers from Stafford had sourced Ziggy for us in late 2016 and helped to equip her with all the items we needed for our tour and had started to advertise her for sale a little while ago.

There had been a couple of people interested in the sale including an American couple who just about drove us crazy with an endless list of frivolous questions which went on week after week.

We had finally had enough and basically gave them a “put up or shut up” ultimatum and thankfully they dropped off the prospect list.

During late October/early November a British expat living in Spain had begun showing considerable interest in Ziggy.

His only concerns were based around all the challenges of importing Ziggy in to Spain.

Once he had all that sorted out he wanted to proceed with the purchase.

He gave us the go ahead in early November and transferred the purchase amount in full in to our bank account on the 14th November.

He had agreed to our “turnkey” approach” which meant that he was not only buying Ziggy but all the chattels as well including electric bikes, Garmin Sat Nav, crockery, cutlery, linen etc etc.

It was a good deal for us as foreigners in that we could just walk away but a good deal for him as well as it meant he could just walk on board and absolutely everything was there ready to go.

However it left us in a rather awkward situation – we had sold Ziggy, had been paid in full but we were still in France and had to get Ziggy across the English Channel and back up to Stafford for the hand over – every time I drove through an intersection I felt as though every car was going to run in to us – fortunately we got Ziggy back up to Stafford without any mishaps.

### **Thursday 15th November**

#### **Watten – France**

**Our campsite for tonight: Aire de camping car, Watten – GPS N50.831390. E2.208790**

Watten is a free camp spot catering for about 12 motorhomes and is one of the closest Aires to the Calais ferry or Chunnel.

The site is only a short walk to the shops and restaurants.

The facilities included free grey and black water disposal and water and electricity were available at 4 Euros each.

### **England**

### **Friday 16th November 2018**

#### **Stonebridge, Coventry – England**

**Our campsite for tonight: Toby Carvery Stonebridge, Coventry – GPS N52.446190. W1.688470**

Had another uneventful crossing from France to England via the Chunnel.

The new departure terminal has now been completed and there are restaurants and duty free shops in the departure waiting area.

Felt a little uneasy walking around the departure area with French police patrolling through the shops with their fingers inside the trigger guards on their machine guns.

Sailed through both the British and French immigration checks – the French check being the Schengen departure point and we had been in the Schengen zone for around 12 months and we were supposed to exit after 3 months.

Had to familiarise myself again with driving on the left hand side of the road in a large LHD vehicle, but it didn't take long.

Endured a long and boring drive from Dover to Stonebridge near the NEC.

Camped in the Carvery carpark – no charge – fully floodlit – had a great meal and a pint in the carvery – very nice – but had to get used to the British high prices again.

## Stafford – England

### **Saturday 17th - Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> November - Michaels Steer's house - Stafford**

Arrived at Michael Steers house in Stafford and began discussing all the arrangements regarding preparing Ziggy for her new owner.

Michael had arranged for a full engine service and MOT on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> November and a habitation check on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> November.

The engine service and MOT went through very smoothly and when the habitation check was done we had a new rear skylight hatch installed.

Our purchaser Steve arrived and we went through Ziggy showing him all the workings of the Hymer.

Steve moved Ziggy to a nearby camping site that Mike had arranged and we picked up a rental car.

We had a last dinner with Mike and Anne at a nearby English pub, sampled a couple of local ales and had our last sleep at Mike and Anne's house.

Wednesday morning we said our final goodbyes to Mike and Anne and headed off in the direction of Gatwick in the rental car.

Mike and Anne had been absolutely fantastic hosts and we couldn't thank them enough.

If anyone is contemplating purchasing and or selling a motorhome in the UK then you could not do any better than have Mike Steers at UKMotorhomefinder assist you.

## Gatwick – England

### **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2018 - B&B Gatwick**

Had a boring but uneventful drive from Stafford to Gatwick where we had arranged a B&B until our departure on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> November arriving Brisbane at 06:40 on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> November.

We flew Emirates as we couldn't get a seat on Qantas – must say we were disappointed with Emirates – the flight and staff were nowhere near as good as on the outbound Qantas flight.