

Interrail Diaries: Summer 2023



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June 8 2023

About a month from today, I will begin traveling around Europe for roughly 5 weeks by my preferred method of transportation - train. While certainly not the most original subject for a journal - thousands of others have made similar journeys over the years - I still wanted to record my travel experience. I'm sure someday I'll be sitting in a rocking chair in a nursing home, reminiscing on these times and having my thoughts put on paper might be something that I cherish deeply. Human memory is also a curious and unreliable thing. I hope that writing will help keep alive some of these memories and tidbits about Polish street corners or parks in Slovenia that I would likely forget otherwise.

I have also become a tad obsessed about my own productivity lately, though not in the typical workaholic type of way, but rather in my own fleeting passions and hobbies. Last July I turned 26, placing myself squarely in my "late" 20's which I suspect is what triggered my acute sense of lost time, combined with spending two years on and off experiencing a pandemic, which makes me feel like a "lost" quite a bit of time to be free. Namely, I've spent a lot of time over the last year reading any and every book that is even remotely interesting to me, bicycling all around New York City, and returning to my forgotten childhood hobby of computer graphics and coding in the form of video game development. Reading a ton of books will be easy to do while traveling due to the advent of eReaders and book piracy, however I am not planning to travel with a bicycle or a computer, so the cycling and game development will have to be put on hold. The idea of keeping up with writing this journal will at least fill me with the sense that I'm "doing something", knowing I'll have a creative project completed at the end of what is - let's face it - an indulgent vacation.

As of right now - this is what my tentative travel plan looks like. By the end of this journal, I suspect this list will not be the same.

- Athens
- Trizonia/Nafpaktos (attend my sister's wedding, hang with my pappou)
- Fly to Warsaw
- Krakow
- Auschwitz
- Budapest
- Zagreb
- Plitvice Lakes
- Ljubljana
- Munich
- Freiburg
- Lyon
- Marseille
- Barcelona
- Madrid

Things to bring

- Passports (I have two. I am a dual citizen of the US and Cyprus)
- Shirts
- 1 pair of pants
- Multiple pairs of shorts
- 1 bathing suit
- Socks
- Sneakers (I wear Asics)
- Underwear
- Baseball cap
- Cell phone
- Headphones
- Wallet (with a zipper for Euro coins)
- 5000 mcg B12 vitamins (I'm deficient)
- Deodorant
- Toothbrush
- Toothpaste
- Razor and blades
- Shaving cream
- Tweezer (I have a unibrow)
- Sunblock
- Notebook
- Pens and pencils
- Tablet (for eBooks)
- Nintendo Switch (I've preloaded it with Clubhouse Games. I'll be an expert in chess, hex, and Nine Men's Morris by mid-August)

Before I embark, I take words of wisdom from the brilliant Che Guevara.

"The first commandment for every good explorer is that an expedition has two points: the point of departure and the point of arrival. If your intention is to make the second theoretical point coincide with the actual point of arrival, don't think about the means – because the journey is a virtual space that finishes when it finishes, and there are as many means as there are different ways of 'finishing.' That is to say, the means are endless." - Che Guevara

As I take my journey I want to keep in mind one of my favorite pieces of travel literature - Che Guevara's *The Motorcycle Diaries*. I don't have much interest in just sitting on a beach or hanging out at restaurants. Generally, when I travel I spend hours walking, ending up in oddball backstreets areas of my chosen destination, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

I'll use a recent local example. Last Saturday I rode my bike up to Staten Island. I had the intention of hitting a few places: a specific taqueria, Cloves Lake Park, a donut shop and the Wagner College campus. I managed to hit all these places but also came across a number of other curiosities, like a "Little Liberia" street sign, the Audre Lorde walking trail in Silver Lake Park, a really cool playground on top of a hill, and some of the island's famous wild turkeys. The point is, I could have been a normal person and simply not done this and spent my weekend doing normal activities, maybe playing board

games or getting coffee at my local cafe, but I do believe these seemingly pointless excursions do serve some self-serving greater purpose whether that be educational or simple amusement, much as Guy Debord believed when theorizing the "dérive".

"The sudden change of ambiance in a street within the space of a few meters; the evident division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres; the path of least resistance that is automatically followed in aimless strolls (and which has no relation to the physical contour of the terrain); the appealing or repelling character of certain places—these phenomena all seem to be neglected. In any case they are never envisaged as depending on causes that can be uncovered by careful analysis and turned to account." - Debord

I hope this exercise in psychogeography breaks up some of the malaise that getting too comfortable in my work schedule brings about.

July 4 2023

I've started my journey in Europe with a horrible summer cold. After force feeding myself a pre-made tuna sandwich in the Madrid airport during my seven hour layover to Athens, I suddenly began sneezing and sniffling uncontrollably. I managed to keep myself mostly together on the flight, but once I hit that polluted Athens air, my symptoms worsened. Sitting on the crowded metro line between the airport and Monastiraki was miserable, and I feel bad for the people around me who had to deal with me wiping my nose in their vicinity.

I will note that there was a young man, about college-aged, sitting across from me on the metro reading Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* translated into Greek. I began thinking about how the translation differs from the English version and how Wittgenstein's points about language creating a picture of reality being so central to his thesis, thus whatever he was getting out of this translation was ultimately different from anything I got. It also made me realize my own ethnocentric having not arrived at that same thought when I read it in English, as it was originally written in Wittgenstein's native German.

I arrived in Athens around 8PM, ordered two souvlaki sandwiches from the same shop near Omonia Square that I ate at when I arrived in Athens last year. The guy working there always seems to like me because I speak to him in Greek instead of English. Afterwards I took a shower and went straight to bed with a soundtrack of a house remix of "Set Fire to the Rain" by Adele faintly playing from the hostel's rooftop bar.

The following day I had a bus to catch at 3:30PM. My e-ticket just said "ATHENS to NAFFAKTOS". I stared at this on my phone from my hostel bed in the morning and realized I had no idea where the bus station was. What was worse is that Google Maps led me to the conclusion that there are two major bus stations in Athens. I asked the concierge at my hostel, and she told me to go to the Kifisou station. I still went to the station two hours early to give myself enough time to get to the other station if she was wrong. She was not wrong.

Because I had so much time to kill at the station I walked to the nearby ruins of Plato's Academy, keeping with the theme of famous philosophers I suppose. I was surprised by how unassuming the ruins were. They sit in a very typical looking urban park. There's a couple plaques with information surrounding the ruins but they are graffitied over and faded, thus very difficult to read. As for the ruins themselves, they aren't much to look at. It's essentially just the foundation of some of the buildings that were there. It feels a bit wrong that what is possibly the most important location in the history of Western Philosophy is sitting in the middle of a residential Athenian neighborhood with no fanfare or upkeep. Still, it's a cool spot. You can walk right on the ruins free of charge and think to yourself "I'm standing where Plato stood". I was also happy to add the first two lifer birds of my trip to my log: the eurasian hoopoe and the rose-ringed parakeet.

I am now at pappou's house in Kato Dafni and feeling much better than I was a few days ago feeling mostly better but still phlegmy.



The birthplace of Western philosophy

July 7 2023

Preparations for the wedding are underway. I have been lounging a lot at the various beaches around here: Monastiraki, Blue Lake, Marathia. I have begun to feel a bit sedentary, not accomplishing much but reading and eating. I walked around Kato Dafni this morning before it got too hot, but nothing much to report.

Tonight I will be going to the wedding location, Trizonia, for the first time during the trip.



Trizonia, Greece

July 13 2023

Today is my birthday and it's raining very heavily in Warsaw. I walked into the Mercure Hotel to sit in the lobby and wait around the rain. I am entirely unprepared, without an umbrella, wearing just a t-shirt and shorts. It's still going, so this is a good opportunity to add to my journal which I've been neglecting.

I have not written at all during the wedding festivities of last week. It was an astoundingly successful ceremony. I'm happy that my parents and sister were able to see their hard work come together so well. I'm also proud of myself for giving a speech in Greek with minimal errors.

As nice as it was to sit on the beach every day and be with family in Greece for two weeks, I do have this insatiable desire to keep moving and being back in a city is satisfying that need. After a three hour drive to the airport in the middle of the night (special thanks to my distant relative Yorgos), a flight to Warsaw, and another ride on the metro to the city center, I am now comfortably in the great nation of Poland.

After leaving the Centralna Station, I was immediately welcomed by intense heat and humidity, as well as a view of the Palace of Culture and Science, a gift to Poland from Stalin's USSR and at one point in time, the eighth tallest building in the world. My first stop was the Warsaw Uprising Museum where I was bombarded with images of Warsaw getting destroyed and various Nazis. Everywhere I turn, there's brutalist communist apartment blocks. The whole city still feels traumatized by World War II. Poland was probably the country that got physically affected the most during the war, which is saying something because Japan had two atomic weapons dropped on it during the same war. Poland lost about 18% of their population over the course of WWII.

The Old Town feels a bit less "traumatized" as I put it. There's even a Hermès store. Like much of the rest of the city, it got destroyed during World War II, but was later meticulously reconstructed with as much of the same materials from the original buildings salvaged as possible. It's really incredible because if you didn't know that, you wouldn't even notice.

I don't want to talk bad on Warsaw though. This is a really nice city with many bike paths and beautiful parks. There also happens to be a lot of depressing things to look at, but the future looks bright!



Apartment blocks in Warsaw

July 15 2023

Yesterday I boarded the 7:46 AM train headed to Zakopane out of Warsaw. I fell asleep for a solid chunk of the portion between Warsaw and Krakow, but I got a few glimpses of the rolling hills of Poland's countryside inbetween naps. In Krakow two Polish-American immigrants boarded with their children who, judging by their accents, were born in the US. The father kept making similar comments to his family every 30 seconds or so.

"That train is so 1980's."

"This town is stuck in the 80's"

"THAT train is straight out the 90's"

"These houses with the aluminum roofs are typical 1980s Poland".

Not sure he knew what he was talking about.

After 6 hours I arrived in Zakopane. I had few plans besides to hike. Zakopane is the resort city adjacent to Tatra National Park, locale of some of the most beautiful scenery in Europe. For this first day, I walked to the top of Gubalowka which is easily done in less than an hour. I passed some sheep on the trail and of course saw the *really* tall mountains in the distance. There's the option to take a cable car to the top, so when you get there, there's restaurants, observation decks, even some weird slide ride. There's a proper amusement park at the bottom cable car station.

When I returned to the hostel, I spoke to the hostel owner and an Australian backpacker named Henry. Both gave me ideas for hikes that were about 10 hours in length. I had brought zero hiking gear. The longest proper hike I've ever completed was maybe 3 hours long. I eschewed their suggestions for the route to Czarny Staw Gąsienicowy which looked easy enough to get to without coordinating a bus or cab to get to the starting point. It would also undoubtedly not take the whole day to complete. I did still need to get to the train station later in the day. After three hours of hiking, I saw the crystal clear lake with the Tatras towering over the valley. This location is essentially the border between Poland and Slovakia. I eventually got to a point with increasingly steep climbs, nearing rock climbing conditions. I was starting to encounter snow on the ground, colder temperatures, and heavy winds. The people on the trail all had trekking poles and helmets. I got intimidated, decided I had seen enough, turned around, and walked back to the entrance. This is easily one of the most beautiful places I've seen in the world and an absolute requirement for traveling to Poland as far as I'm concerned. I am aware that Morskie Oko is the more popular lake to visit in the Tatras, but from what I had read, the whole hike is on a cement road and can get very crowded. This trail was quite crowded as well, but at the very least you're walking on a proper trail - not cement!

Now I'm sitting on a very steamy Polregio train en route to Krakow. It's very different from the modern one I took yesterday. Judging by the wood finish I'd say this train dates back to the 70's or 80's. (I'm starting to sound like that guy I was sitting across from yesterday.) The train cools down a bit when it's moving and outside breeze can flow in from the windows, but the train make stops for what seems like every two minutes. It feels like I'm on a local subway line. When we come to a stop, the car heats up pretty quickly. I'm not feeling great about being here, but it will make for an interesting story some day. I should also note that the toilets on the train have no plumbing. There's

just a hole cut out the bottom of the train for your waste to drop on the tracks as the train speeds to the next station. Apparently this is a thing in Eastern Europe and other parts of the world that use older trains. I had no clue.



Czarny Staw Gąsienicowy ("Black Caterpillar Pond" in English)



Incredible scenery in Tatra National Park, Poland



July 17 2023

I'm currently sitting on the first international train of my interrailing trip, writing from some place straddling the border between the Czech Republic and Slovakia. I actually got out in some place called Breclav for about 15 minutes and walked around the square in front of the station for a bit waiting to transfer to my train to my next destination, Budapest. I think I can technically check off that I've been to the Czech Republic now.

Anyway - Following my time in Zakopane, I spent about a day and a half in Krakow. The name Krakow invokes memories of reading Calvin and Hobbes, which is where I first heard of Krakow. In one strip Calvin is daydreaming that he is superhero Spaceman Spiff fighting enemy ships in outer space. At the end of the strip it is revealed that Calvin is actually in class taking a test. Susie asks him "What was the capital of Poland until 1800?", in which Calvin replies "Krakow." "Krakow" is in fact, just a sound effect Calvin was saying out loud representing shots fired from his spaceship. Beyond this, I knew next to nothing about Krakow. At the time when I first read that strip, I wasn't even sure it was a real place.

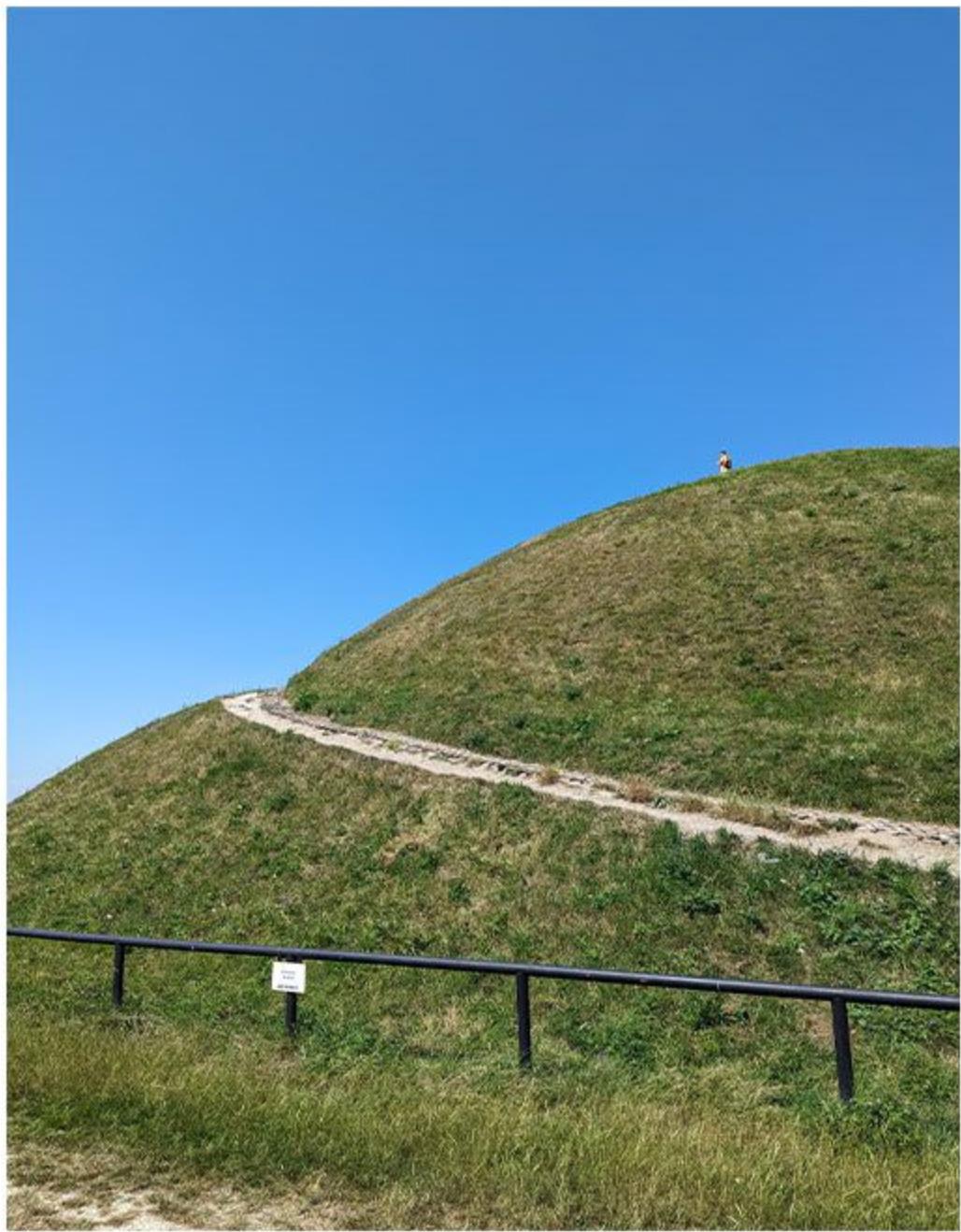
Krakow is certainly a lot more tourist friendly than Warsaw. It's much smaller and walkable. It also has more sights that would be of interest to a tourist like the Wawel Castle and the Jewish Quarter. It's also much closer to popular attractions in Poland like the Tatras and Auschwitz, as well as other popular cities in Europe like Prague and Vienna, so it makes sense that many tourists chose Krakow over Warsaw. Wawel Castle is definitely very impressive for its sheer size alone. Nearby is the Krakus Mound, an artificial hill which is said to be his burial ground. It is said to have been built by legendary Polish prince Krakus. In reality, the reason for the mound being built is unknown, and it could be as old as the 2nd Century BCE. I climbed to the top of it despite being very hot and hungry.

I also toured the Kazimierz neighborhood and nearby Podgorze which contained the city's Jewish ghettos during the German occupation. One architectural detail of note is an arched passageway in Kazimierz which was used for filming scenes from Schindler's List. According to a plaque on the side, the arch was an intentional addition by the Germans to orientalize and further otherize the Jews, to make it seem like they don't belong there. The neighborhood does feel very out of place, unlike any place I had previously seen in Poland. It feels more Southern European, maybe with a splash of New Orleans. In spite of its Nazi association, this type of architecture which is unique to the area has attracted a number of cafes and vintage shops giving the neighborhood a bohemian feel against all odds.

In Podgorze, you can see a piece of the former wall which was built around the Jewish ghetto that still stands. Podgorze was where Jews were moved after being forced out of Kazimierz, then afterwards into concentration camps. I visited Oskar Schindler's enamel factory which was nearby. The museum is really more about the German occupation of Krakow than Schindler himself. It was pretty jarring to see Nazi uniforms right with the skulls on the caps right in front of me. I was reminded of the classic Mitchell and Webb "Are We the Baddies?" sketch. I didn't expect the area surrounding the factory to be so gentrified. Many of the former factories have been converted into apartments and there's a lot of new buildings including a modern art museum next to the factory that opened in 2011. I had lunch in a well-decorated Vietnamese restaurant in one of the new buildings. There are a lot of Vietnamese immigrants in Poland which was not something I knew before arriving.



"Schindler's List" gate in Kazimierz



Krakus Mound

The following day I made a day trip to Auschwitz. I find it interesting that the city is usually still referred to by its German name in English, not the Polish one, Oświęcim. It feels a bit disrespectful, but I suppose most people are talking about the camps not the actual city when they bring up Auschwitz. I went on a tour in what I could only describe as "miserable" weather. I got to the camp around 12 PM and my tour began at 12:15. In the 15 minutes that I was waiting in the lobby, a thunderstorm broke out and continued for the entire duration of the tour. We walked in heavy rain between the lobby and the first room which is a theater that showed a short documentary on Auschwitz. Afterwards, we had to wait inside for quite a while to wait for the rain to calm down a bit. A woman on my tour group kept loudly saying how she "wasn't going outside" and that it's "not safe." I mentally noted the irony of being in one of the most notorious sites of mass death and torture while this woman was so concerned about this inconvenience of walking in heavy rain for about an hour. She did in fact, not join us for the rest of the tour.

I don't feel the need to go too much into the details about Auschwitz here. It's obviously depressing and horrible to even think about. The most shocking thing was witnessing the enormous piles of discarded shoes, eyeglasses, jewelry, and disability aids of the deceased. There is also a room with piles of human hair, which was used by Nazi Germany to create fabric as it was cheaper than cotton.

When it stopped raining, I walked to the Birkenau Complex where I saw something very bizarre. There was a sticker on a pole in front of the complex depicting a sad Pepe the Frog in Nazi uniform. If you've seen the documentary *Feels Good Man*, you know that Pepe has a fascinating history associated with a huge spectrum of political communities from online alt-right message boards to protests in the streets of Hong Kong. Is this sticker pro-Nazi or anti-Nazi? I couldn't even figure it out. Either way it feels disrespectful and absurd.

I was also surprised by how many people wanted their photos taken at Birkenau. A father and his son stopped me as soon as I arrived so I could take a picture of them. I saw people taking selfies on the train tracks. There was a large group of Orthodox Jews getting their picture taken at the entrance as I was leaving. It is a bit macabre, but I guess they just want to prove to their friends and family that they went.

Auschwitz is essentially the midpoint between Krakow and Katowice so I decided to go to Katowice for one night, which was not in my original plan. I said that I knew next to nothing about Krakow, but I knew actually nothing about Katowice. Katowice is part of the Upper Silesian metro area which is the largest metro area in Poland with more people than Warsaw or Krakow, so there had to be something to see. When I woke up in the morning, I Google searched "things to do in Katowice" and landed on a few things to see before my train in the mid-afternoon.

I went to Nikiszowiec, a former early 20th century industrial estate which is well-preserved as it was. It was a planned garden city with everything you needed in a centralized area: churches, markets, bakeries, etc. This was so coal miners in the area did not have to commute to work. It reminds me of the row houses near the Steinway Piano Factory in Astoria, Queens which served the same purpose when they were built. Depending on the way you look at it, it's either brilliant altruistic urban design or a dystopian exploitation by the ruling class to control workers. In any case, it's just a normal neighborhood now with a bit of an artsy vibe and some old world charm because of the old-timey architecture. Of course, walkability has seen a resurgence in popularity as a desirable feature in a neighborhood as well, as attitudes towards automobiles have shifted among younger people, so Katowice benefits from that as well.

I learned more about Katowice's mining history at the Silesian Museum. Unlike most larger Polish cities, Katowice has no old city like Warsaw or Krakow. It is not

a city with medieval origins, but a rather industrial ones and originally boomed in the 1800s. Additionally I learned about Silesia's history with German, Slovaks, and Poles all shaping its history, as well as the region's importance in the Solidarity labor movement. Two miners from Katowice were shot to death during the movement. Every museum in Poland is so depressing.

Because of its economic importance, Katowice was the recipient of many public works projects in the Soviet era. Near the museum I saw a massive brutalist theater called the Spodek which looks like a spaceship. I also have to mention the Gwiazdy Estate, a complex of enormous star shaped towers which immediately caught my eye when my train pulled up into the city the previous day. I was fortunate to find enough time to walk around the grounds.

I'm really glad I decided to stop in Katowice at the last minute. It's an architectural mecca. I'm also impressed I managed to do all these things before my train left at 3:01 PM.

My train is now about to depart from the Slovakian City of Nové Zámky en route to Budapest. The Polish chapter of my interrailing trip is done. I think my biggest takeaway from visiting Poland was how badly World War II destroyed parts of Europe and Poland in particular. I realize this makes me sound like an ignorant American, but maybe I deserve that. In America, at least for my generation, World War II feels like a long time ago, part of a very different era. I have no family that fought in WWII. There's no concentration camps in America, and other than Pearl Harbor American soil was not attacked. In the US people wear t-shirts with the American flag that say "BACK TO BACK WORLD WAR CHAMPIONS" and are entertained by Saving Private Ryan and Call of Duty. It really never felt tangible before coming to Poland where the effects are still lingering.



Spodek in Katowice, Poland



Nikiszowiec, Katowice

July 20 2023

Yesterday's weather was truly disgusting in Budapest. Humid, extreme heat, and muggy. It isn't helped by the traffic congestion and urban grit typical of a big city like Budapest. Today's weather was, on the other hand, perfect, but I'm on my way out now.

I had few expectations for Budapest which was a city I never had any particular interest in visiting. I've been charmed by the glut of incredible architecture including Baroque, Renaissance, Classical, Brutalist, and Modern. Budapest is a city that has been invaded, occupied, and destroyed by everyone from the Celts, the Romans, the Huns, and Ottomans so you get a bit of everything.

I did make one error while I was in the city. I visited the Hungarian National Gallery, when I really intended to visit the Hungarian National Museum. It was a fine museum, but not the one I wanted to go to. At least I have something to do if I ever find myself in Budapest again.

I'm currently on the train from Budapest to Zagreb in Croatia. I've enjoyed the scenery along Lake Balaton, passing small resort towns and fields of sunflowers. It's very hot in the car, and I'm jealous of people I see swimming in the lake.

There are also a LOT of other people with interrail passes on this train. It appears to be mostly British and German college students headed towards the Croatian coast to party. In general, there were a lot of backpackers walking through Budapest. There's a very rowdy group in front of me screaming things in German, and someone behind me is playing rap songs out loud. It reminds me of the Saturday night "drunk trains" on the Long Island Rail Road. I sound like an old man complaining about it, so I'll stop now.



Budapest, Hungary

July 22 2023

I'm writing from my room at an inn near Plitvice Lakes National Park in Croatia. I can't get wifi in the room and the TV doesn't work. So what better time than now to write a journal entry?

I arrived in Zagreb two nights ago and went straight through the graffiti filled tunnel at the train station into the city, while most everyone else on the train got on the connecting overnight train to Split.

Zagreb is a bit more "Eastern Bloc" feeling than I expected. Outside of the Old City, the landscape is dominated by socialist housing blocks interspersed with freestanding homes not too far off from what my grandparents' house in Greece looks like. It's really bizarre to walk 1 mile outside of a European capital city's center and suddenly see chicken shacks and hear roosters cock-a-doodling-dooing. The tourism industry of Croatia sure does a hell of a job making Croatia look like... not this. They really lean on the Dalmatian Coast's cities. I should also give the benefit of the doubt to Zagreb because I arrived shortly after a storm with gale-force winds heavily affected Croatia and Slovenia, killing 5 people. There were a lot of fallen branches all over the city, and I fear I may not have caught the city in its brightest moment.

Zagreb's Old City is small, but is nice and closer to what I expected from Croatia. Streets are walkable. There are old churches and endless souvenir shops. I ate cevapi and lepinja bread which were delicious. I stopped in a museum called The Museum of Broken Relationships. The museum is unconventional because it has no items of historical or cultural note. On display are items donated to individuals associated with breakups with related anecdotes written on the side. Items included a sweater made for a former lover, a destroyed wedding tape, and a dildo which was shaped off someone's former partner's penis. The museum reminds me of Leanne Shapton's book *Important Artifacts and Personal Property from the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris, Including Books, Street Fashion, and Jewelry* which tells the story of a couple's separation through auction catalog items. I usually skip these novelty museums (Zagreb has a lot of them, like The Museum of Selfies), but this one was interesting enough to prevent me from rolling my eyes.

I didn't do much else admittedly because it was raining and I was pretty tired. I watched the Barbie movie in a theater of Croatians decked out in hot pink, walked around the Old City a bit more, then went to bed.

Today I endured a three hour bus ride through rural Croatia sitting through bumper to bumper traffic, picking a single passenger up in the city of Karlovac, then driving through some really run down rural villages, as well as some cute ones to be fair. There's one restaurant and one market near where I'm staying. I've been to both already, so now I will rest until I can see the waterfalls at Plitvice Lakes tomorrow.



Brutalist architecture of Zagreb

July 24 2023

I'm sitting on the floor of the Zagreb train station 6 hours later than I had anticipated. The 7:05 AM train was canceled, so I have to take the 12:50 train to Ljubljana. Because of this, I got to spend another morning in Zagreb. The question is: do I want to spend any more time here? I found somewhere to do some laundry, then walked to the Nikola Tesla Museum which was unfortunately closed. I ended up crashing the Sheraton lounge to use the restroom, charge my phone, and more or less just chill out.

Yesterday was a much more exciting day at Plitvice Lakes. I woke up early to enter the park right when it opened at 7AM. This was well worth doing because by the time I left around 2PM, the trails were so overrun that you could barely move. It would have been a long shuffle to get to see certain waterfalls which fortunately I got to see with a much smaller crowd. The turquoise color of the water is something I had never seen anywhere before and I was able to cross off five lifer birds: common merganser, northern wheatear, white wagtail, European robin, and the great tit. When I got some space away from the other people, which is more do-able on the harder trails, I really enjoyed myself. I feel like I run into this crowding problem in a lot of supposedly "natural" sights. They're as overrun with foot traffic as Times Square.

I was hoping to go to Lake Bled in Slovenia today, but with the train delays it's definitely not worth it. There's rain in the forecast tomorrow. I'll see how brave I feel going up to the lake in those conditions. For today, I'll just explore Ljubljana, a city whose name I did not know how to pronounce before today.



Beauty of Plitvice Lakes



July 25 2023

The train to Ljubljana was an old, hot one. I opted to sit on the floor in the space for luggage due to a lack of seats. Fortunately, there were some great views alongside the Sava River and the greenest mountains I've ever seen. It's definitely the best train ride so far as far as scenery. It rained through part of the journey and a bit of water came into the train cars, which was admittedly refreshing.

Ljubljana was not what I expected, especially coming from Zagreb's aggressively communist aesthetic. I learned that because Slovenia was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire for so long and because it was the first country to leave Yugoslavia, avoiding the worst of the wars during the 90s, Slovenia ended up wealthier and more developed compared to other former Yugoslav republics. There's also quite a bit of Austrian and German influence compared to Croatia. Makes sense as Slovenia's right on the border with Austria.

The baroque architecture contrasts significantly from Zagreb's brutalism, though there's a bit of that here too. The downtown sprawls across the Ljubljana River with a lot of pedestrian bridges, feeling almost Venetian (not that I've ever been to Venice...). There's a medieval castle on top of a hill that I climbed to. The best and most important thing however is that there are no cars allowed in the city center. Bicycling is very popular. For reasons related solely to urban planning, this might be my city I've been to over this trip so far.

I also visited the most interesting neighborhood I've encountered over the course of my trip as well. Metelkova was brought to my attention by the concierge at my hostel. She informed me that it is a place to see street art. I expected it to be the typical "arts district" that's found in almost every big city these days. Upon arrival it was apparent to me that this was some kind of anarchist squat. Metelkova, I learned, is an autonomous zone within Ljubljana, settled in former military barracks built under the Austro-Hungarian Empire and abandoned after the breakup of Yugoslavia. The compound consists of a number of art studios, a bunch of tourists gawking at the graffiti and taking pictures (myself included), as well as signs that said "DON'T BUY DRUGS IN METELKOVA" everywhere.

Today, I slept through a pretty gnarly thunderstorm in the morning. At 12:50 PM, I braved the weather and rode through intense thunderstorm conditions to Lake Bled. Fortunately it cleared up right before I detrained in Bled. The lake itself is beautiful, in almost a cliche way. It looks like a Windows desktop background. There is a church on an island in the center, a castle on a hill, and the Julian Alps in the background. The only downer was that much of the mountains were obscured by the rain clouds. Otherwise, the town is just OK, but very touristy. The lake is probably Slovenia's most famous attraction so I'm glad the rain cooperated with me.

Currently I am still waiting for the train at Bled Jezero train station which the board indicates is running 57 minutes late. I'm comfortably seated on the curb staring at the tracks, but it looks like the rain is about to return if the sky is any indication.



Ljubljana city center



Metelkova



Lake Bled

July 26 2023

Today has been a bit of a mess. I cannot wait to arrive in Munich and eat some dinner.

Before I get into that, I'm still thinking about how nice Ljubljana was. I wish I could have spent another day to visit the Skocjan Caves, which are among the longest cave systems in the world. I might have to come back. The only major downside is that it kept raining. I was caught in a torrential thunderstorm leaving dinner last night.

This morning I boarded a train around 9:30 AM, with the expectation I'd get to Salzburg a bit past 1 PM. Despite the sign on the train platform reading "Frankfurt", the train stopped running in Villach. This meant waiting around in Villach for two hours. Villach is a good place to stay to do things in the Alps, but I didn't have time for that. As for the city itself, there isn't much to say.

When I returned to the station, I learned that my train was completely full and I had to take a replacement bus to complete my journey to Salzburg. So I spent two hours on a bus through the Austrian Alps. I got to Salzburg three hours later than I anticipated. I walked around for two hours, saw Mirabell Palace, the Salzburg Cathedral, a weird church with a giant sculpture of an ear on the side, and Fortress Hohensalzburg (from a distance). It was cold and rainy, so I finally broke down and bought a €6 umbrella in the train station. This was the only purchase I made the entire time I was in Austria. One positive about train travel is that stations are usually smack in the middle of town, so you can do things like get the gist of a city in two hours. I'm on the regional train to Munich now. It's another half hour or so before I arrive. After this long day with travel interruptions and lousy weather, I'm ready to get off and get to my hostel.



Riding a bus through the Central Eastern Alps in Austria

July 31 2023

It's been a while since I've written anything. Time to catch up.

My last journal was written en route to Munich which feels like it was ages ago. I was excited to go to Munich because I have a vague ancestral connection. My paternal grandparents were former residents of Munich working in an elastic factory while my father remained in Greece. My dad has told me that my pappou taught him how to count in German when he returned to Greece because there would be a chance they'd be moving back. For whatever reason, they ended up in New York City Instead. In a slightly different timeline a bit of my soul might have ended up in Bavaria. I felt very "at home" when I visited Detroit, where my first relative in the US lived (Pontiac technically, but close enough). I felt the same sensation in Hattiesburg, Mississippi where my mother was offered a job in the 90s, but didn't take it. I expected a similar experience in Munich, but I didn't feel the same. Munich is pretty nondescript. Munich, I've learned, is more conservative compared to other parts of Germany. It's also wealthier due to the abundance of jobs and industry. That's not bad on its own and I'm sure this is a good place to live, but not the most exciting place to visit. I'm glad my grandparents came to New York instead.

A couple things I enjoyed:

- Albrecht Dürer's self portrait at the Alte Pinakothek Museum
- Peter Paul Rubens' massive paintings at the same museum. The paintings were of such a massive scale which inspires me to do bigger things in the future.
- The Olympiapark
- The path on the Englischer Garten for bikes and pedestrians.

Beyond that I wasn't too into it. I didn't expect so many American tourists to be in Munich. These tourists weren't the typical backpackers I had been encountering either. They were large families who spoke very loudly in English with regional American accents.

I ended up taking an earlier train to Freiburg, a city I knew nothing about. I booked it because I wanted to go to a city near the Black Forest. I was surprised by how much I liked it. Freiburg has been nicknamed "Green City" for being at the forefront of ecology. The most famous neighborhood in Freiburg is called Vauban. Vauban is the site of a former French military base that was occupied by different hippie tribes for many decades. In the 90s, the area was set aside for eco-conscious development. All homes and buildings are ultra-low energy. Streets are car-free. The majority of residents have no car but either walk, bike, or take public transit where they need to go. It's a hippie utopian "Green New Deal" place that's hard to believe is real in a country as capitalist as Germany. Similar to Ljubljana, Freiburg also has a car free city center which is a delight to walk around. Walking around the more suburban parts reminded me of the Pacific Northwest of all places. It's the Portland, Oregon of Europe!

As green of a city that Freiburg claims to be, there's still H&M, Ernst & Young, McDonalds, and Burger King. This is still a consumerist city and country. I want to take a moment to compare Vauban to a very different neighborhood I visited earlier this year, Ciudad Bolívar in Bogotá, Colombia. Vauban is a rarity. It exists within a wealthy country and within the city of Freiburg which is home to the prestigious Albert Ludwigs university. This experimental community which hasn't been replicated anywhere else, as far as I know, is located in a liberal college town. Ciudad Bolívar is the largest slum in Bogotá

and one of the largest slums in the world. As a result of decades of instability in Colombia, migrants from around the country made their way to the fringes of Bogota, setting up makeshift and typically illegal settlements in the mountains surrounding the city. This is the poorest part of the city and is considered extremely dangerous to outsiders due to gang activity related to the drug trade.

For a city of the future, as Freiburg has sometimes been dubbed, to exist there is the need for resources from the Global South, ravage poorer countries, and create places like Ciudad Bolivar. These places are unsurprisingly not very eco-friendly. Before visiting Colombia I read a book called *Planet of Slums* by geographer Mike Davis. One of the points he makes is that many of these slums and shanty towns are major polluters. When built on riverbanks, the water becomes polluted leading to disease. As these cities get more crowded, air pollution becomes a problem with increased motorization. Cobalt from the Congo and granite from Papua New Guinea keeps places like Freiburg running, but none of these cities would ever be considered the greenest.

I do think we need more cities like Freiburg. Reliance on cars is unnecessary and creates all sorts of quality of life problems, let alone environmental ones. I remain skeptical of the human race's ability to engineer our way out of climate change in the first world without doing it at the expense of the Global South. I don't think the Green New Deal will ever work, but we should probably still try it. I don't have any better ideas anyway.



Vauban cityscape



The next day I took a hike in the section of the Black Forest directly next to Freiburg. There was a thunderstorm right before I went in. The weather forecast on my phone said no more rain, so I decided to walk in. I only saw four other people over the course of three hours of walking in the forest. I got some nice views on the observation deck, but after taking the picture I quickly came down. I'm afraid of heights and the wind was scaring me. The same day I managed to get to a barber because my hair was beginning to drive me mad. The barber was a Turkish immigrant who didn't speak English so I had to put my usual cut in Google Translate and show him my phone. "Short on the back and sides. Thin out the middle." "Hinten und an den Seiten kurz. Die Mitte ausdünnen".



Scenes from the Black Forest

On my final day in Freiburg, and the first without rain, I took advantage of the good weather to go to Switzerland for a day. Basel is less than an hour away and Luzern is roughly two. As a former Long Island Railroad daily commuter, this felt like nothing. I will be using the German name for Luzern, not the French name of Lucerne. It's in the German speaking part of Switzerland. It just makes more sense even if most of the rest of the English speaking world calls it Lucerne.

Basel is known for art of course. It is home of Art Basel, which at this point, might be more associated with Miami than Basel. Switzerland is a notorious tax haven where a lot of art collectors store and trade without being taxed. See also: money laundering.

Kunstmuseum Basel was pretty good and tasteful. A lot of the German Renaissance stuff was there, similar to the museum in Munich. There were a lot of Giacometti's paintings and sculptures too which is cool to see in his native Switzerland. Basel is full of old people and money so it's very clean and pleasant but not exactly a party town.

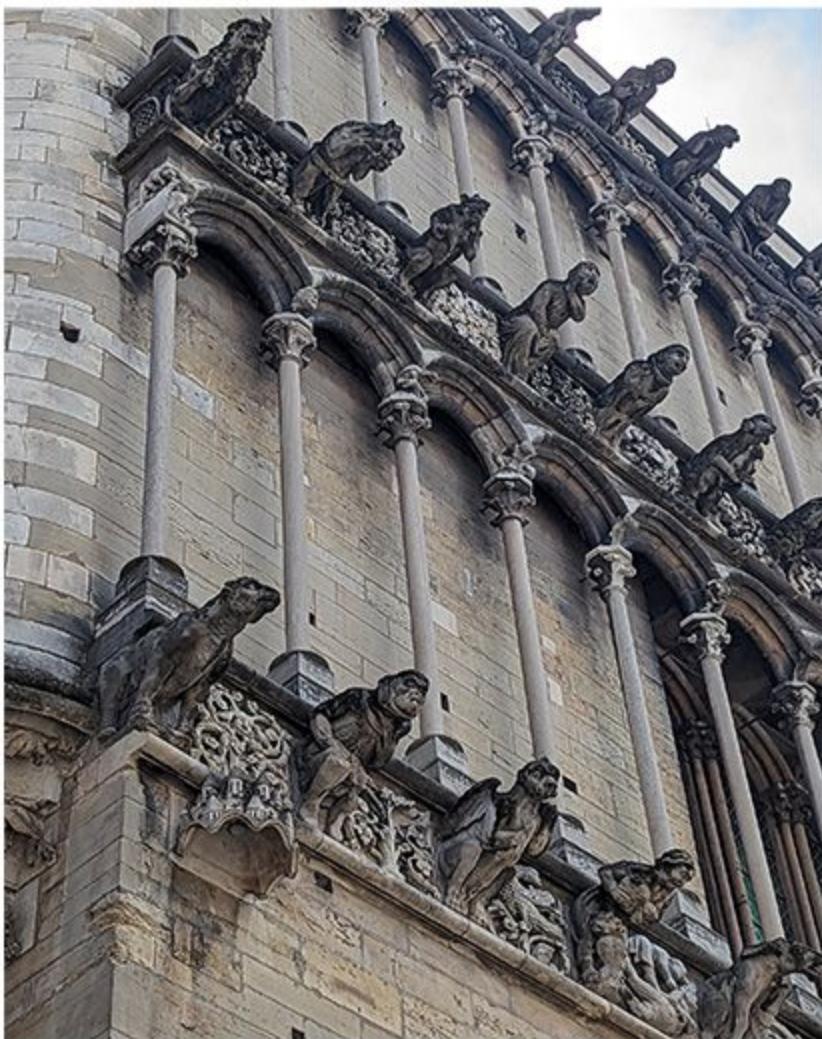
I made it to Luzern after an hour of train travel. On this train I noticed a small black speck on the underside of my arm. I tried to brush it off but it wasn't moving. I moved my eye closer and upon closer inspection, there was a tick latched onto my arm. Fortunately, I had my tweezers, that I had packed for my unibrow, in my backpack and was able to yank it out when I got off in Luzern. I spent some time frantically Googling tick-borne diseases and rates of Lyme Disease in Southern Germany, but maybe it's best to just not think about it if I'm having no reaction.

Despite the natural beauty of Luzern, I did not like the city. The city is overrun with people, marinas, and touristy attractions so it was hard to appreciate the city as beautiful as the location is. Lake Bled in Slovenia was a lot more lowkey and is pretty much the same idea, a big lake in the Alps. I may have liked it more if I actually went up to the mountains.



Brief moment away from crowds in Luzern

It is now the following day and I'm on a regional train to Lyon via Dijon. I managed to get out in Dijon for an hour and before transferring trains. I saw the city's Notre Dame church that has this crazy design with gargoyles jutting out the entire facade. There's also a statue of an owl on the side of the church which you can rub for good luck. I rubbed it. I also sampled some of Dijon's world famous mustard in a shop. They gave me little wooden sticks to eat straight up mustard, no crackers or bread or anything like that. It felt pretty psychotic, but this mustard was definitely the best mustard I ever had.



Church of Notre-Dame of Dijon

August 4 2023

Lyon was ok. It has a beautiful setting on the Rhone River, and yet another pleasant "Old" City area. The city is renowned for world-class cuisine, but all I really ate there of note is something called a chausson from a place called Toké in the Paul Bocuse Food Hall. It's marketed as a French empanada, which is pretty much on the money. I don't really know exactly what was in it. Peppers definitely. I think tomatoes and olives. I'm not a professional chef.

There's a museum in the city called The Museum of Confluences. It looks like Pokémon to me (Maybe Kabuto or Porygon). There is also an impressive fountain outside the opera house sculpted by Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, who was the sculptor of the Statue of Liberty. Outside of the Old City, the mall, and the train station, Lyon is a pretty sleepy place. It was a fine place to spend a day, but beyond that I probably would have been bored.



The Musée des Confluences

Arriving in Marseille was a whole different story. Within ten minutes of walking out of the station some stranger was talking to me in French. I'm not sure what the case was, but he seemed to be upset that I was looking at him. The reason I was looking at him was because I wasn't sure if he was talking to me or not. He then proceeded to touch the side of my neck at which point I swiftly walked away. This is probably the worst thing that's ever happened to me while traveling.

Despite this bizarre and uncomfortable incident, I loved Marseille. The city is known for its grit, as well as being at the crossroads of a number of civilizations. I enjoyed the break from the European fare to eat Moroccan and Algerian food. During my time in Marseille, I visited Le Corbusier's original Unité d'habitation which is probably the number one architectural highlight of this whole trip so far. I even got to peek into some of the rooms because the cleaning service was working in the hotel section with the doors open. I also had the pleasure of taking a hike to the Marseille Calanques beach which was equally as incredible. It was a day full of both man-made and God created beauty.

Marseille is such a great city. When I was researching things to do online, prior to arrival I read a lot of comments on travel forums from French people dismissing it as a horrible place or at the very least not worth visiting. The uncomfortable truth is that this attitude is derived from racism, as much of Marseille's population is Arab or Black.

One of the books I've been reading over the course of my many, many train rides is one that was released this year called *Architect, Verb* written by Rainier De Graaf. One chapter focused on the idea of livability, and which cities are deemed more livable than others. Every year groups like Mercer and EIU put together lists of cities considered more livable than others. It's usually the same crop of cities: Sydney, Zurich, Vancouver, etc. Essentially it's a list of wealthy cities in wealthy countries. De Graaf makes a point that a city like Baghdad, is one of the world's most populated despite making the opposite list of least livable cities. Baghdad is still a center of culture and commerce for whatever problems it has, and millions live there. There are in fact many wealthy people who do business in Baghdad because of Iraq's importance in the oil trade.

I don't want to compare Marseille to a city like Baghdad that has been devastated by war. However, Marseille is not a city that's ever put on these livability lists. Still, compared to a city that does often make these lists, Basel, Marseille was a much more interesting and lively place. Thousands call it home, way more people than Basel can claim. Why isn't that "livable".

While in the Provence region, I also took a day trip to Arles, a compact little city about an hour away by train from Marseille. I was able to see where Van Gogh was interned after chopping his ear off, an old Roman arena, and some fancy new Frank Gehry building, but only from the outside. I didn't go in. The Gehry building signals the Bilbao-ification of Arles as an art destination. Provence is a really beautiful place. Riding the train between Arles feels like looking out into an impressionist painting. I would love to come back and ride a bike through some lavender fields.



Hiking to the beach in the Calanques, Marseille



Inside Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation



Arles, France

August 8 2023

Before arriving in Barcelona I've had a bit of a hellish round of travel days.

While writing my previous journal entry I was bound for Toulouse, a city I originally had no plan to visit. I had a few extra travel days and going to Spain directly from France is more complicated than it should be, considering the two countries are directly next to each other. My train was running smoothly to Toulouse until we arrived in Montpellier where we were stuck for two hours due to a track fire near Beziers. This was bad enough, but I was seated next to two French teenagers who were playing fart noises and a distorted version of the Teletubbies theme song from their phone and cracking up. I wasn't as amused as they were.

I got to Toulouse around 8PM. I quickly walked through the city center before the sun set. I really enjoyed the city for the few hours I spent there, and I owe it a longer visit some day. The architecture of the city is famous for its distinct adobe brick style. Stone was rare in Toulouse, but clay was abundant, and that was the style dating back to the Roman days. I got a decent amount of photos during the golden hour.



Red clay brick building in Toulouse, France

I had to leave around 9AM the next morning to catch a series of local trains to Perpignan. Originally, I was supposed to ride to Perpignan and then to Portbou to Spain where I could board to train to Barcelona. I rode to Perpignan, transferred to the train to Portbou, made it to Cerbere on the border of Spain and found out the train wasn't moving any further. There was a wildfire in Portbou and the border was closed. My only option was to ride back to Perpignan and pay for a bus to Barcelona. I was hoping I'd be able to get out in Portbou and see the monument to Walter Benjamin. Benjamin fled to Portbou to flee the Nazis and committed suicide there. His grave is nearby the monument.

The nice thing about all this ordeal was that I got to see Perpignan for a few hours which was a really interesting city. It is part of Northern Catalonia and most residents speak Catalan. You even see the Catalonian flag around. I also had the chance to see the coast along French Catalonia on the journey to Cerbere. This is the nice thing about train travel I suppose. I got to see way more of Southern France than I ever expected.

I'm off to Valencia tomorrow and will write about my time in Barcelona another day. For now, I need to sleep.



Perpignan, France



Somewhere between Perpignan and Portbou.

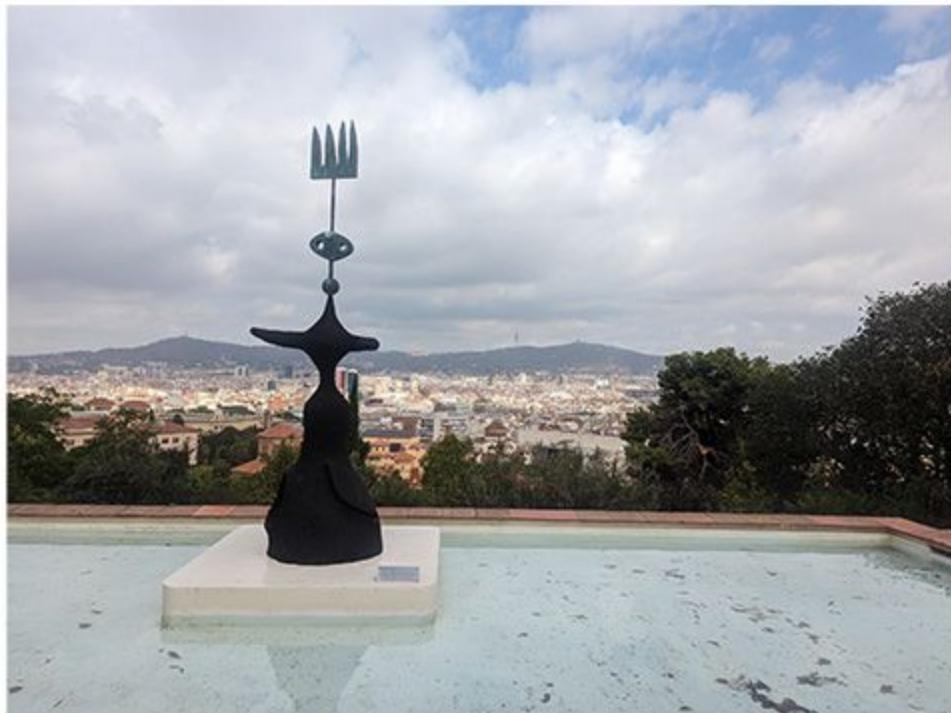
August 10 2023

Barcelona was alright, but I expected more. People rave about it. It feels like a very typical big city. I don't get it. Beyond the Gaudi buildings that get paraded around on tourist sites and Instagram, it's a pretty generic place. I did see some nice things.

- Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion
- Museu Nacional d'art Catalunya
- Fundació Joan Miró
- Camp Nou
- The Raval and Gracia are fun neighborhoods to walk around

I really don't have much to say. Many things in this city are overpriced. Museums and attractions are usually around \$15-20 euros. I refused to pay to enter Park Güell. Parks should always be free.

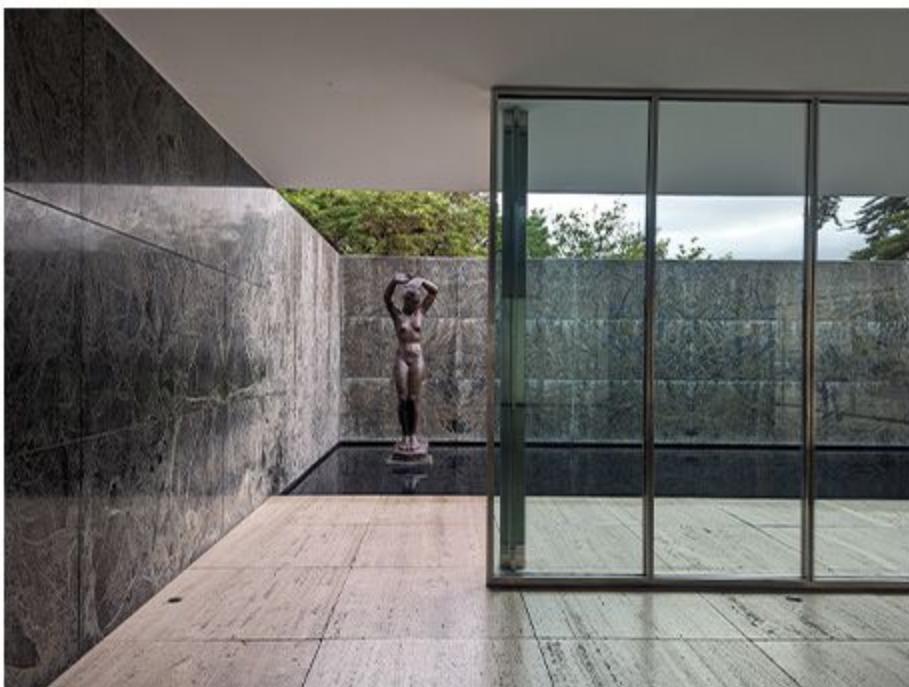
I'm currently enjoying myself in Valencia by going to the beach and eating paella every day. It's very hot but after traveling for nearly a month, walking miles a day, I'm very down for being lazy for a bit.



Fundació Joan Miró overlooking Barcelona



Antoni Gaudí's Casa Vicens



Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion

August 14 2023

Though there are still a lot of tourists there, Valencia felt much less touristy than Barcelona. The city, while not exactly small, is pretty walkable. It was definitely a welcome change from the Ramblas of Barcelona. I think that's the main reason I didn't particularly enjoy Barcelona. It was annoying to get around with just my feet. Valencia is Spain's second busiest port after Algeciras, and the seventh largest overall in Europe. I walked to the city beach a few days ago and swam in the ocean with a rainbow of shipping cranes behind me.

A heat wave has hit Spain over the last few days, and I opted to cancel my trip to Cordoba which had a forecast of 113 degrees fahrenheit on the day I was supposed to arrive. Instead, I spent an extra day in Valencia. On this day I rented a bike to l'Albufera, a salt water lagoon on the outskirts of town. It had been more than one month since I had last ridden a bike. I forgot how much I enjoyed it, especially in a city that I've never seen before where I could see a lot of sights quickly. I wish I had rented bikes in more cities, but then again, I'm not made of money. L'albufera was a great place to walk around even though most of it was inaccessible. At the Interpretation Center I saw three lifer birds: a black winged stilt, little ringed plover, and the greater flamingo.



L'Albufera Natural Park, Valencia

I am now in Madrid. My final day of having a valid Eurail pass was yesterday so I forced myself to travel to Toledo in 103 degree heat. It's a beautiful city, so I'm glad I made it out.

Toledo is home to one of the strangest museums I've ever been to, The El Greco House. Upon arrival, I read information on the walls and learned that El Greco never lived there. A wealthy financier purchased a rundown home in Toledo's Jewish Quarter under the impression he may have lived there, then recreated what he imagined his house may have looked like. Essentially, it's El Greco fan fiction. There are real El Greco paintings upstairs at least.



Toledo, Spain

Today I went to Madrid's Prado Museum which was fantastic as expected and later explored a neighborhood called Usera, which is Madrid's Chinatown. Overall, I much prefer Madrid to Barcelona. Barcelona is pretty drab outside the tourist areas, at least the parts I saw, whereas Madrid feels like the type of huge city I like. The biggest downside is that it's very hot. I'm currently hiding in my air conditioned hostel instead of doing fun things outside.

August 21 2023

I'm back in New York and have been for a few days.

The last few days in Madrid were very nice, though still very hot. I mostly spent the time in museums or lying down under trees in parks. I was very content to stop worrying about train schedules.

I'm happy to be back. It feels good to have my own bed and kitchen and get back into a routine. I'm grateful to have visited every place that I visited over the last month. I learned something new in each new location. In the end, the best place is always home. New York instead.



Madrid Atocha Station

Conclusion

So I've completed my trip. Many people would come back from a long trip like this and describe it as life changing. I don't feel like my life has changed and I'm not an advocate for this sort of mentality because I don't think it's true for everyone. I'm in the fortunate position of having travel be part of my life from a young age. I had parents who both frequently traveled for work and grandparents who lived on another continent. I've been getting on airplanes pretty much yearly since I was a toddler. The truth is I'm still me, but I had fun and learned a few things that I might not have been able to just from the book or online articles.

In the days following my return to New York, I've begun reading Manuel DeLanda's *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, prompted by a visit to Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid right before I left. There was a temporary exhibit called "Maquinaciones" which was curated under the framework of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Some of Guattari's sketches and diagrams were on display. Like the exhibit, DeLanda uses Deleuze and Guattari for much of his frameworks as well. Like Deleuze, Guattari, and DeLanda, I am fascinated by the networks that run the world and the endless nodes of commerce, geology, and linguistics that shaped the world as it is today. Traveling almost exclusively by train, a literal network, makes that apparently clear. Despite myself adjusting to climate, topography, and language in a different city every few days, I could (almost) always rely on the train, thanks to thousands of years of trade in the European continent that made it possible to get from Warsaw to Madrid with relative ease.

DeLanda writes in *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, "Central Place capitals such as Madrid, Network-system metropolises such as Amsterdam, and hybrids such as London used their own biological or mineral materials to dissolve foreign defenses, break apart loyalties, weaken the grip of indigenous traditions. After gaining entry onto foreign soil this way, a massive transfer of people, plants, and animals was necessary to establish a permanent European presence". Europe was the dominant force of the world for a very long period in time through abuse of networks for many reasons that can be argued, but undeniably their historic trade routes and advancements in science at a particular point in time put them at an advantage and the effects of that are still felt to this day as Europe remains among the wealthiest parts of the planet. It is from this incredible network that Europe was put at an advantage that the world shaped to the way that it is. In the age of globalization, Francis Fukuyama may have said that we are at the end of history and David L. Friedman might say that the world is flat, but time is proving that to be false. The UK left the European Union. Russia invaded Ukraine. Right now I have been following the surge of coups taking place in the Sahel region of Africa from Mali, Burkina Faso, Sudan and most recently Niger. At the same time, cultural issues are at the forefront of all politics. In my home country of the United States, key issues in the Republican primary and general political discourse are Critical Race Theory, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and the "woke" agenda. This seems topsy-turvy to me as these are only issues obsessive political junkies care about, and so minor compared to issues like poverty, hunger, and climate that drive the major political events of our lives. However, those issues are not easy to fix, they are the result of a complex nonlinear organization of contributors, are usually out of sight, and there are many people who profit off the existence of said issues. Thus, other, more distracting issues, are kept at the forefront. Our lives are much more affected by the copper and timber industries than the woke Barbie movie or even Trump's indictment.

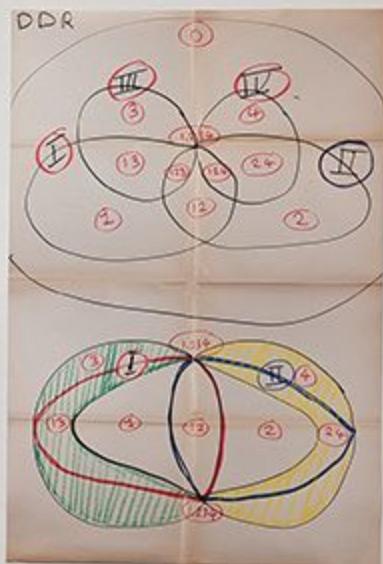
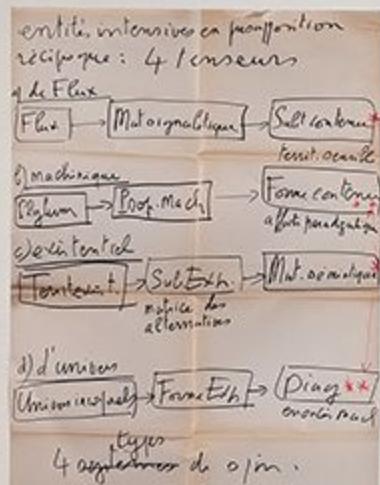
If I gained any lesson from this trip, the longest and most expansive that I've ever

taken is that the world is an incredibly complicated place with more knowledge to be learned than anyone can anticipate in one lifetime. Moving from place to place on train lines that were, for the most part, originally came into existence to transport goods, not people shows the way resources and material drive history and development. These trains, to me, might have been a vacation, but this network built the modern world. I'm a small piece in a huge rhizome that I couldn't possibly comprehend the scope of. This is evident to me as I parse through all my different thoughts that made up this journal. I've brought up topics from Hong Kong protests, Moroccan immigration in Marseille, slums of Bogota, and cobalt mines in the Congo, all tying back into the same continent. As Asia, Latin America, Africa and the rest of the world continue to develop and urbanize as they have been since the age of colonialism, we'll run into new empires, new technologies, and new realities. There are now more nodes to exploit and getting from one corner of the globe to another has never been easier, save for maybe right before COVID. Small communities and indigenous cultures become rarer, but the need for land, minerals, and water does not.

Cultural differences are normal, and I saw more cultural differences than I can account in a short period of time over a relatively small slice of the globe. It all felt very normal. I don't believe this is what causes wars or many problems at all. The future could be determined by cholera outbreaks, uranium deposits, blocked trade routes, or melting ice caps. It's through a network of all sorts of variables that causes wars, financial crises, and other major political events. The train network which I studied nearly daily during this trip and leading up to it, is a perfect physical analogy.

The other lesson I've gained is that traveling is very fun and you learn a lot. I'm glad to have had this opportunity, one that will shape me for years to come. I referenced Debord in my first journal entry before I left. I believe in the restorative and educational power of walking around a new location in the modern world. It's important for critical thinking, whether at home or another continent. "Travel" as an industry isn't important necessarily, but as an open and positive mindset it definitely is.

For now, it's time for me to return to work and recontribute my time and labor to this crazy world.



Diagrams by Felix Guattari



When he isn't hopping on trains in Europe, Peter Toubanos lives and works in Far Rockaway, New York. In his free time he tries his hand at writing, video game development, cycling, birdwatching, and planting vegetables in his backyard.