

Danke Schön

Coming Soon:

tomandlauracraig.com

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General Update

Since it has been about one month since I last wrote one of these, I figured it was best started with a general update on life in Germany. To put it simply, I could not be more pleased with the transition, or more proud with how good Laura, Ashlyn, and Adam are all doing. I will not say the transition has been easy, but it has been much smoother than I could have ever hoped for. We of course have had a few homesick moments, but when you have as wonderful of friends and family as we have, this is to be expected. It is hard to believe we have been her together for over a month, and I have been here for two. WOW!

Neuschwanstein Castle

A couple weekends back, we took our first exploration "vacation" in Germany and decided to drive four hours to see the Neuschwanstein Castle. We left on a Friday evening, and returned the next night after exploring all day. The Castle was a breathtaking creation, and was the inspiration for Walt Disney's Sleeping Beauty Castle. The Castle was under construction for 17 years, until the King died (when construction immediately stopped), and was only one third complete at this time. Laura told the kids that we will be seeing a lot of castles while we are in Europe, but we have probably started with the most impressive. The castle has a fascinating short history, as does the king that built it.



the summer around 6,000 visitors a day stream through rooms that were intended for a single inhabitant.

The setting of Neuschwanstein could not be more idyllic. However, movement in the foundation area has to be continuously monitored, and the sheer rock walls must be repeatedly secured. The harsh climate also has a detrimental effect on the limestone façades, which will have to be renovated section by section over the next few years.

Since 1990 the Free State of Bavaria has spent around 14.5 million euros on the renovation and maintenance of the castle and improvement of the visitor service.

Here is a short bit from the website:

www.neuschwanstein.de/english

Seven weeks after the death of King Ludwig II in 1886, Neuschwanstein was opened to the public. The shy king had built the castle in order to withdraw from public life – now vast numbers of people came to view his private refuge.

Today Neuschwanstein is one of the most popular of all the palaces and castles in Europe. Every year 1.3 million people visit "the castle of the fairy-tale king". In

Top 10 Travel Wish List (no particular order):

1. Paris
2. Amsterdam (6 hr drive)
3. Prague (4 hr drive)
4. Rome
5. Venice
6. Munich (2 hr drive)
7. Budapest
8. Athens
9. Barcelona
10. London

FIS (Franconian International School)

Ashlyn and Adam just finished their third week at FIS, and are doing wonderfully. We were prepared for tears and a struggle the first morning, and we received none of it. The kids have taken to the school, and have had no problem making new friends. After hearing for weeks from Adam while we were still in the US that he would not make any new friends in Germany because he is "too shy," instead he seems to really be coming out of his shell and is blossoming. He seems to be liked by all his classmates, and has no problems finding kids to play with. Ashlyn likewise has already made many strong relationships. On her second day of school she was invited to a friend's house for a play date, and has been getting very involved in after school activities. She is currently in cheer and Girl Scouts, which she really enjoys. I am incredibly proud of how well they are doing, and love their circle of friends which includes kids from: Sweden, UK, Australia, India, Japan, Nigeria, Germany, and of course the US.

Laura Update

For all of those that have been worried about Laura since my last newsletter, here is the latest. SHE'S BACK! To nobody's real surprise Laura's calendar did not stay blank for long. After about one week, I was already hearing about "how busy" she is. While she has been very selective with her commitments, her regular schedule includes: 2 bible studies (one of which she now leads), Girl Scouts (where she is the Assistant troop leader), two yoga classes, a spin class, and has gotten involved in the International Women's Group. Laura also has a regular group of women where she has periodic trips to get tea and chat. I had to laugh, when after two weeks in Germany, Laura volunteered to take a women "new to the area" out and show her around. She has also been asked to work at the school, but at least to date she has managed to say no. I have my money on Mayor by 2010!

Move In Day

April 14th, 2008 is a day that will long be remembered in my life. It is the day that not only my bed that I had not slept in for two months arrived, but it is also the day when 15 boxes of dry foods shipped from the US were delivered to our house. While I was slightly embarrassed on one end of the journey pushing the pallet through the aisles at Costco, and then asking the movers to pack it all, I was overjoyed on this end. With each box of Honey Nut Cheerios, Top Ramen, Macaroni & Cheese, Cream of Mushroom Soup, brownies, and refried beans that were opened, I could feel the tears forming. It was such a beautiful sight!

The move has gone relatively smooth. We are still buried under boxes, but have had only minor problems with items not fitting. Two pieces would not fit downstairs as intended, and quite a few items have been sent directly to the rafters for storage, but in all, the house is coming together nicely. The kitchen has been the biggest struggle as there is simply not enough room for all the stuff we brought (not to mention there is some crazy design on the use of space). Pictures began to go on walls yesterday, and it is truly beginning to feel like home.

The guest bedroom is setup and we look forward to many visitors!



What A Glorious Sight!



Schneeflocke playing at the Nurnberg Zoo.

Nurnberg Zoo

Saturday, April 26th, we went to the Nurnberg Zoo with Ashlyn's Brownie troop. The Zoo is absolutely beautiful. The grounds (like most of Germany) are extremely clean, and there is a great variety of animals from all over the world. Included in what we saw where: zebras, giraffes, gorillas, snakes, crocodiles, dolphins, prairie dogs (which we have decided Laura is one, inside joke), flamingos, rhinos, elephants, penguins, and polar bears. The current big attraction to the zoo is the recent addition of a 3 ½ month old polar bear named Schneeflocke (Snowflake). The bear was out playing around when we first arrived, and the kids loved seeing this. After spending so much time at the San Diego Zoo, we were not expecting to be nearly as impressed as we were. Another big draw is that the zoo is one of very few things actually open on Sunday.

International Support System

One of the most eye opening experiences so far, has been the exposure to this international lifestyle, and the life of the Expats. There is a whole world out here of people that are on assignments either as a one time only, or as part of a life they have chosen to move from place to place. We have stepped into this very foreign world, and been blown away by how welcoming and warm this community is. They all understand the struggles that you can face when moving to a new area, and there is no shortage of people willing to help. You immediately have a common bond with regards to moving far from home, and this seems to set the foundation for meeting a wonderful group of people.

As I have thought over the past two months about this, I consistently go back to two themes. First, I realize how oblivious I was to people that may have entered my life in the past having relocated (either from within the US or abroad). While I don't feel I treated these people poorly, I had no clue of how much help they may have needed that I could have provided had I only been aware. Second, I think often of what will happen to these relationships when our time here is done (or their time is done). I can only hope that I am able to keep in contact with them, but am realistic that many of these relationships will simply grow apart. I think it is this awareness that makes me want to get to know each of these individuals better than I ever would have in the States, and learn as much as I can from them.

My New Wheels



Suzuki Swift....My car is blue.

With our new home in Baiersdorf being located about 25 minutes from both the FIS and from my work, we knew that living with one car would no longer work. So after weeks being tormented with attempting to determine what type of car to get, we got to a point where we were desperate, and just needed to find a car. With this in mind, we drove from dealer to dealer trying to find a car that would fit our needs. The sole purpose of the car is to take me to and from work, and my only requirements were that it was four doors, automatic, cheap (by German standards) and got good gas mileage (gas costs about \$8 per gallon). We had success, and found a car that had all this, and gave me some extras like heated seats, navigation, and keyless access. The funny thing is that this car makes the company car I was provided on my arrival (which I thought was so small) look like an SUV. I have quickly learned the value of small in Germany (for gas and for fitting on these roads).

Contact Information

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91074 Herzogenaurach

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951-541-9303

¹³I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:13