

Brian's  
Solo Europe  
Trip '96

Summer 96  
Did you know that Amsterdam has a wide and varied selection  
**Amst**  
Amsterdam  
... months in the area of dance, music,

Köln  
Frankfurt(Main)

FAHRSCHEIN

29/07/1996 13:18

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Hotel National  
... van Main

I finally did it!!! Six months in printing but I finally finished. Here's my tome about my '96 research trip to Europe. I can hardly wait to go again even though this trip turned out to be a tough and lonely trip for me. It's a long letter but I hope you enjoy it.

Brian

7/26 (1996)

The trip to Europe was long. Barbara, Jeffrey and I got up at 4:00 AM to catch our first flight from San Francisco to Pittsburgh. This was Jeffrey's first flight, at 10 months old, and he did fine. The second leg was to New York City. From there, Barbara and Jeffrey went to Little Rock to visit her parents while I went to Europe. It was a real long day for them. My day was even longer and I had pulled my back out two days earlier so I was in pain the entire trip.

Getting through JFK was difficult because the TWA flight 800 explosion had just happened five days ago at that airport. Barbara and Jeffrey were flying TWA. Security was tight.

I flew Singapore Airlines to Amsterdam and my bag was checked three times before I got to my gate. Once in the air though, the famous Singapore Air hospitality took over (my coach seat had first class footroom, we got lemon scented hot face towels with every meal, we had a selection of oriental specialties for dinner and breakfast, and you were never without a drink. I flew Singapore to Hong Kong on a business trip four years ago and received the same treatment.). They really are the best airlines in the world.

I was able to get some good shots of Ireland and England as we passed. It was overcast and raining in Shipole when we landed.



*The coast of England near Manchester*

7/27

This airport was big! I know my fellow '94 Europe friends flew into Shipole, Amsterdam when they did the Bus, Bed & Breakfast trip (BB& B). I flew into and out of Paris when I did the BB& B trip. That airport (Charles DeGalle) was dinky by comparison, and CDG is no dinky airport either. Fortunately, Shipole was also very efficient. I was on the train heading to Haarlem in no time. On the way, I talked to a lady who had just come from Johannesburg, South Africa (on her way to Memphis, with an 8 hour layover) and an elderly German lady who spoke no English (our conversation was REAL basic). Surprisingly, my back no longer hurt.

I checked into the Hotel Amadeus then set out to see everything I missed last time I was in Haarlem. I never was able to get into the church last time (Grote Kirche, St. Bavo) so that was my first stop. Nice pipe organ. Now I was getting excited about being in Europe. Next stop was the Frans Hals house / Museum. Now that I've had my Northern Renaissance classes, I recognized much of the art there and it made the experience that much more pleasant. Unfortunately, it was still overcast so I was unable to take pictures in this "natural light only" lit museum.

Tangent #1: My wife bought slide and print film for me right before we left. I had my SLR camera for the slide stuff and Barbara's point & shoot for the print film. I specified my favorite film, Fuji, but neglected to tell her what speed film. She got 100 ASA for slide and 200 for print, neither of which was going to work on an overcast day. For that matter, the slide film would be impossible to use anywhere in Europe, due to the no flash rule. Only a Japanese tourist could use such film. But I digress...

I began to seriously drag at this point. I had had only 3 1/4 hours of sleep over the past two nights. I slept all afternoon. When I awoke, the smell of pizza was wafting up the staircase from the pizzeria down below. I had dinner there and although it smelled good, the pizza was really bland. Rick was right. Don't eat there. After dinner, I met 50+ teenagers from Michigan who were on a school sponsored European Vacation / Summer School. Gee, they didn't have that elective when I was growing up. When I got back to the Amadeus "piano bar," Dave told me that someone had bombed the Olympic village. Wow, last time I (we) came here, O.J. had just been arrested for murder. It seems that every time I go to the Hotel Amadeus, something happens in America. I can hardly wait to come back here again in a few years!



*Grote Kirche, St. Bavo*



*Duck House on the Canal*

He also told me that the day before the Olympics, two Irish youths were able to gain access to the Olympic stadium and take pictures of themselves on the podium and on the race track. It was big news in Europe but it was never mentioned in the U.S. The European news was using this to show how very lax the security was and Dave was not at all surprised that a bombing could take place. Dave also thought that the "American" Olympics were too commercial, even though in Europe, there were no commercials on any of the four stations that were broadcasting the Olympics, ever. If only he knew. He justified his statement by saying that no Olympics should make a profit, and the Americans profited.

Tangent #2: Yes! four stations: two in English, one in German, one in Dutch plus CNN highlights every hour. No commercials, no Dick Emberg moments, equal viewing of all events and & countries and NO JOHN TESCH. It was worth it to wake up at 3:00 AM every morning to watch quality Olympic coverage. It was just about the best part of my trip, certainly the best unintentional benefit of going.

7/28

After a hearty breakfast, I was off to Amsterdam. This year, I would take the tram system to save a lot of walking. I estimated that I had walked about six miles my first time here.

I got on the tram and before you knew it, absolutely nothing looked familiar. I was lost on my very first tram ride. Somehow, I wound up in “Hotels USA” (Holiday Inn, Marriott, Best Western, etc...) district, well outside the city center. Once I read my map, I discovered that I had missed the Rijksmuseum by 10 kilometers or so. Two trams later, I found the museum.

The outside looked the same but the inside had changed considerably. Two years ago, there were temporary partitions up while they worked on part of the museum. That work had been done and the rooms were arranged thematically and by artist. I concentrated on Rembrandt, because it was his museum after all, and Vermeer because I would be doing a seminar class on him in the fall (which I have since completed. My paper was “Who is this Vermeer guy anyway?: A study of scant original documentation.”).



*Some Vermeer Paintings*

Next stop was the van Gogh Museum. It was still quaint and I still left thinking that I could have saved 12.50fl. I skipped the Sedjik even though it had an exhibit of Dali.

Suddenly the sun came out and it got very hot and muggy. While taking the tram to Rembrandt’s house, I came across a park full of nudists. I guess they don’t get many days like this.

I wound up at the Jewish House instead of the Rembrandt House. The map I was using was wrong. Well, I had two other maps so I looked at the second map. Oh, it’s across the river. Wrong. This map was wrong too. Had any of these map makers actually been here before? My third map was the Rick Steves map. It was right. I guess he had been here.

In my opinion, the House was not worth the search, and that’s what Rick had said in his book too. I should have listened. My last stop was to buy T-shirts and shot glasses for some friends from Hard Rock Cafe, Amsterdam. Then I could go back to Haarlem and hit the Corrie Ten Boom House. So off I went to the red light district where the Hard Rock was located. Last time I was here, the red light district was my favorite part of Amsterdam. I found it “culturally interesting,” being a straight-laced preacher’s son.



*A place I saw while lost*

Things weren't looking right so I got out map #2 and verified the direction using the VVV and the street it was on as my coordinates (The problem with this map, and the other two for that matter, is that they only showed canal names. Amsterdam only had street names. The two were incompatible.). I found Hard Rock but it was the wrong one! I didn't know that there were two in this city. I continued on. Nothing looked familiar. Everything was looking very residential. I checked my map. I had just hit a park and the map verified that there should be a park there so I went on. I ran into a Marriott hotel. Nooooo, I'm in Hotel (hell) USA!!! This is where I was this morning!

I had just walked four miles in the wrong direction. The map I used to locate the VVV had shown it on the wrong side of the street. As a result, I had headed in the opposite direction that I wanted to go. The park that I "verified" was not the same park on the map but one of a similar size at a similar distance in the opposite direction. I got on the same tram that I had gotten on this morning (except in the opposite direction) and headed back to the train station.

I picked a fine day to only wear one pair of socks. I had blisters on the bottom of both feet and I was chaffing in other places too. As sore as I was, I decided that I had to get to the Hard Rock because I might never get a chance again. I also decided that I would treat myself to a shirt for my effort.



*Interesting window display for a Coffee shop*

I got there and stood in line for a very long time, but I got my stuff. I was so tired that even the red light district didn't interest me. I took few pictures, even though I wanted to show the folks back home what this place was like (Window boxes with bikini clad women in them, Coffee shops that serve pot). I hobbled back to the train station and went back to Haarlem.

Riding the tram did not save my feet. I estimated that I had walked somewhere between 10 and 12 miles that day. I was in bed by 8:00.

7/29 (my birthday)

I was up at 3:00 again to watch the Olympics.

The night before, I had spent all my money at Stad's Cafe because I knew that I would be leaving this country today for Belgium (BTW, DON'T try the veggie burger at Stad's! They must really hate vegetarians.). My goal was to leave the country with no Dutch currency and pay for my train tickets with my master card. Too bad too because they didn't accept master card at the station. I had to get cash at an ATM. It was at this point that I realized that my P.I.N. number for my AT&T Universal Master card only applied to the calling card portion and not the ATM withdrawal portion. AAAAAAAHHH! After a few primal screams, I realized that as a last minute thing, I had decided to carry my other Master Card in my money belt just in case my AT&T card got lost or stolen. This is the card I used two years ago so I knew that the chances were good that this card would work. It did (whew!), and I was on my way to Antwerp via Lieden and Delft.

I had a 35 minute stop at Leiden so I walked to the city center and back with a rucksack on my back. Today I had two pair of socks on but I still had the blisters. I was literally hobbling.



*A Windmill in Leiden*

was two miles away and it was raining steadily. Still, I felt that if I could get my rucksack in a locker, I'd give it a try. Guess what? No lockers... and no bus service to the center of town. I had missed the only bus in the next hour. I headed out anyway. Grrr. I was determined (hobble, hobble, hobble)

About 200 yards from the station, the steady rain turned into torrential rains. @&#\*!!!! Now I was wet AND crippled. I dried off while waiting for my train.

When I got to Brugge, I could not find a phone to call prospective hotels. You see, I had purposefully not booked hotels so I could go pretty much wherever I wanted to... A very free form trip that Rick would be proud of. I was now beginning to regret that decision. When I found the phone, the line was exceedingly long. I finally found a phone out in the rain. It didn't matter to me. I was already wet.

All the hotels in Rick's book were booked but one had said that a reservation had not called yet and that I could have the room if they weren't there by five. When I called her back, she said that they had arrived. I was doomed... Then she mentioned that because I had Rick's book, and therefore a person of outstanding quality, she would call her mother-in-law to see if she would let me sleep in her spare room. The room was available so I got to stay in a Belgian house that had been built in 1600.

What a break! I got to stay in a genuine Belgian house complete with a chain-smoking Mother-in-law and her two dogs, Rusty and Maroof. I got my own nicely appointed room with an exceedingly comfortable queen sized bed. The bathroom in my room was quite literally in a water closet. Emphasis on "closet."

I made it back to the station with three minutes to spare. I did a similar thing at Delft - hardly enough time to get a feel for Vermeer's home town but at least I could say that I had been there.

My teacher had recommended a hotel in Antwerp so I decided that if I liked it, I would stay there tomorrow night, since I was really on my way to Brugge today.

I did not find the hotel and that was fine. The diamond district by the train station was a nasty awful place, I was hobbled, and it had begun to rain. The city center was two and a half miles away. Not a chance I was going there. The only thing nice about Antwerp was the architecturally spectacular, domed train station, where I got my ticket for Brugge via Ghent.

#### Things go downhill

I had discovered that one blister had popped and another dime sized blister had grown beneath it. This was not at all good. The scenery between Antwerp and Ghent was not at all like I remembered Belgium the last time I was here (on the East side of Belgium). It was not at all pretty. I began to wonder what I was doing in Belgium.

At Ghent, I was supposed to go see van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece. I had an hour and a half between trains, plenty of time, but the city center

I wanted to get money and phone Barbara, so I set off in the rain. I found no ATM machines or phones anywhere. This town was Medieval! How did it become a Mecca for American tourists without these amenities? I eventually got money at a bank with gouge rates.

Dinner consisted mostly of Belgian beers (I was in a drinking mood after my day). I wanted to try at least three at every meal. The waiter kept reminding me that these were not American beers and that they contained more alcohol (5 - 9 % vs. 5%. Big deal.). They were all excellent but I think I liked the “Trappist” style beers the best.

As I teetered home, I went through a hotel and actually found a phone. I called Barbara and told her about my day. I felt a little better after that.

I spent the evening watching the Dutch version of “The Dating Game” and “Wheel of Fortune.” I would try to guess what they were saying and Lucretia, My house Mom-in-law, told me how close I was.

7/30

No Olympics. The only T.V. was downstairs.

I woke-up refreshed but tired (Oxymoron?). After a nice breakfast and conversation about “vitamins” (cigarettes) and her son-in-law’s occupation (Secret service tank driver for soccer game control), I was off.

My first stop was to the Cathedral to see Michelangelo’s Madonna and Child sculpture. The piece (the only Michelangelo outside of Italy) was small for a Michelangelo and it was behind a rail and bullet-proof glass. I couldn’t really see it so I moved on. For BF100, you could go to the apse end and see the tombs and altarpieces, so I did.

100 ASA film in a Romanesque church does not work (my slide film) so I tried the 200 ASA print stuff and surprisingly, I got good pictures of some Metsys altarpieces. I then walked out of the church and across the street to the Memling museum. This former Hôtel was Ideal as a museum. Memling’s work, like the St. John’s Altarpiece and the Shrine of St. Ursula were terrific.

The next museum was the Groeningemuseum. It had Petrus Christus, Memling, van der Weyden, van Eyck and even



*Lucrecia’s House in Brugge (where I stayed)*



*Michelangelo’s Madonna and Child*



*Shrine of St. Ursula and Memling Museum*

ing out. Fortunately, no-one pushed me. After that, I needed a beer. I decided to go on the Strong Henry Brewery tour but it was an hour away so I rented a bike and had a three beer lunch.

I felt no pain as I entered the tour. Through narrow passageways and up and down steep steps I went (sometimes missing steps). I was the only English speaking person on the tour but the tour guide did the English spiel for me. It was somewhat embarrassing but she tried to put me at ease. After the first room, she would find me, explain the room, then talk to the crowd in Dutch and French. One room had a collection of beers deemed worthy by the brewmaster. Hmm, not a single beer from America in the room. The second room had beers that were drinkable if a good beer wasn't available. Two American beers, Miller Genuine Draft and Bud Lite made that list. At the end of the tour, we received a complimentary Strong Henry Beer. Riding a bike got a whole lot more interesting after that.

I spent my afternoon circling the town, riding through parks and following the native bicyclists, figuring they knew where they were going. It was quite enjoyable.

a Bosch. Spectacular stuff! When I got to the last room I saw something shocking — breasts and pubic hair in a painting. I thought that the Renaissance guys didn't do that kind of stuff. Oh, it was made in 1577, I guess that's close enough to Baroque.

In the city hall, they were displaying hand crafted musical instruments. As a musician, I was fascinated, but talk about pricy!

I decided to hit the "big tower" just before lunch, blisters and all. The climb was tough but worth the view. You could see all the way to Ghent (an hour's drive away). The windows were about 4' off the ground and I couldn't see down so I risked life and limb and climbed in the window to take some pictures. It was a long way down and there was nothing to keep me from fall-



*The "Big Tower"*

My call to Barbara that afternoon / evening was much more positive.  
I returned the bike and had a bland dinner with three more beers.  
I had certainly got all my bread group for the day, and I slept well that night.



So I had a  
3 beers, one lemonad  
& waffel lunch  
while waiting for  
the Straffe Herdink <sup>Beer</sup> tour



The after lunch,  
Post 4 beers, tourists,  
cobblestones & traffic  
bike trip was  
both challenging  
and fun.



Here's what  
I saw



## 7/31 Train Day #2

After another pleasant conversation with Lucretia, I was off to Köln to see the cathedral. Along the way, I got kicked out of reserved seats in the non-smoking section and was forced to breath smoke for the rest of that leg of the journey. I wrote 30ish postcards in four hours. You know, once you pass Antwerp, the countryside vastly improves. I guess that's why I liked Belgium so much last time when I went from Germany to Brussels.

### Tangent #3: Clothing

I can now spot most nationalities by what they're wearing. Americans wear shorts and (in English) printed T-shirts. They always have expensive back packs and new hiking boots or sneakers. The Dutch wear jeans and dark colored T-shirts with sneakers. They look like Americans but much taller. The Dutch Belgians look the same but there is a 1' difference. That is, they look like Americans. The French wear polo shirts with their jeans or slacks and comfortable shoes.

Why do I bring this up? Yesterday, I had on my "I'm an American" outfit. I brought this outfit on purpose, in case I wanted to look like a tourist. I was addressed in English wherever I went. Today, I wore a polo shirt, slacks and comfortable shoes.

A couple of people would look at me... you could see their minds working, then they would come up to me and ask me things in French. The two conductors addressed me in Dutch. A rather attractive Belgian sat next to me and was shocked when I didn't understand the conductor's Dutch as he kicked us out of the reserved seats. I understood "seats" in Dutch, but I thought he was asking me to put my bag on the seat instead of the overhead compartment. When I did that (instead of leaving), he knew that I was American, so he spoke English.

The Cologne Cathedral was huge and wonderful. I thought that the Brugge Cathedral was tall (100'), but this place was far taller and wider. I spent an hour in that place before my next train to Frankfurt.

Soon after we started, it was apparent that we would be traveling along the Rhine. I was excited because I would get to see Bacharrach and St. Goar again along with all those wonderful castles. I started shooting like a mad man when we got past



*Cologne Cathedral*

Koblenz.

A little boy across the aisle asked his father in German, “why does that man have a camera?” The father answered “Because he is French and he has never before seen a real castle. You should address him with ‘Bon jour’.” Upon further reflection he said, “Maybe he is an American Tourist.”

Not long afterwards, a man asked me if my seat was possessed (a little German humor). I said “Why. Do you want to perform an Exorcism?” OK, I said “nein” and he sat down. We had a nice conversation. He was Spanish. He spoke a little English but more German. We conversed in all three languages, sometimes all in the same sentence.

He had the wrong ticket so he got kicked off the train because he also had no money.

I came within 18” of the hotel Kranenturm as we zipped by Baccharach.

In Frankfurt, I got German currency and a wonderful wiener. I went to the post office to mail my postcards. Thirty-Five dollars to mail 30 postcards! I had to hit the ATM for the second time in fifteen minutes.

After talking the Best Western Hotel down to DM110 (still a rip-off) from DM200, I was off to the Städtliche Museum. On Wednesdays, the place stays open until eight and it’s free. Boy was I in luck. The only downside is that no cameras are allowed.

I found Metsys, van Eyck, Cranach, Baldung, Renoir, Manet, but what impressed me the most was the Vermeer and Canaletto works. Vermeer’s Geographer was so perfectly photographic from three feet but loosely painted and fuzzy at three inches. Did he need glasses? Did I? How did he do that? (I don’t abide by the camera obscura theory). The geographer’s face was four splotches of pinkish white and a black dot for the eye.

The Canaletto was much the same. At 6’, a photograph. At 1’, paint by numbers.

I ate Greek that night then got on a plane too early the next morning so I could get back to New York



Castle on a hill

8/1

God, I love Singapore Air.

I was going to hit as many museums as I could in New York, but it was pouring and the airport wasn’t exactly close to downtown. At the time, I knew that I would spend three days here in two weeks so, no rush. As it turned out though, our plans fell through and I never got to see anything in New York. Sigh.

Next year (next month by the time I finish this letter), Hawaii.

Brian

