

Brett's Munich Trip

My group at work needed to interface with a group in Munich, Germany, and I offered to make the trip to work things out in person a little before Christmas, 2007. After packing carefully with guides, voltage converters, a German phrasebook, and my laptop, the originally planned flight through Chicago was delayed. They switched me to a Lufthansa flight instead, with decent food and reasonable legroom except that any seat feels small after 12 hours. After a long night and maybe 3-hours shut-eye, I arrived at the terminal and the connecting plane was already gone. A couple hours later I got another one to Munich, to find my bag missing. I grabbed a number in the "lost baggage" area, which was surprisingly well organized and busy for something that's not supposed to happen often. They didn't know where my bag was, but I filled out some forms and they would deliver it when it arrived.



Feeling a little time-zone challenged and airplane weary I headed downtown on Sunday with a couple hours of daylight left to see some sights. A quick trainride, which was surprisingly easy to figure out once I learned how to translate "all day pass", brought me to Marienplatz in the center of town. The amazing escalator ride out of the subway brought a very ornate church came into view against the sky behind the large square filled with bustling Christmas shoppers.

There was a nice Christmas market in the plaza with vendors selling various trinkets and occasional glühwein (heated, lightly spiced wine in a mug). Note that they charge a deposit for the mugs, no disposable cups! It was quite cold and windy at 20°F, and surprisingly crowded with a mix of tourists and local shoppers. I wandered down looking at the vendors and the old and beautiful churches (but relatively recently reconstructed because of bombing in WWII). Cold and ready for a meal I wandered further to Weisses brauhaus. Among other locals and a few tourists in a very historic looking place, I had a humongous plate of sausages, kraut, and boiled potatoes while drinking a .5L Schneider-Weisse. Yummy! I was starting to feel like things weren't so bad



after all. Wanting to taste more beers, but too cautious to ask for tasters, I had a .5L dunkel which was very nice. I barely finished the plate of sausages, and struck out for some more sights. I wandered a little more, but it was getting colder and wanted to visit the infamous Hofbraü beer hall. I walked in expecting to see Japanese tourists engaged in vigorous dancing to oompa music from the reviews I read. Instead I found a lively but inviting large hall with no band playing but many people in conversation drinking huge beers. I found a spot at a table beside a really nice couple who I talked with while I managed to “force down” a 1L beer. It was nice to speak with someone friendly, as the traveling alone was starting to be tiresome.



I left the Hofbrau to go find my hotel, which was a 15 minute train ride and 15 minute walk into a business park. The hotel was very modern and reasonable, the fridge is stocked with free beer and drinks, and as an extra bonus my missing bag showed up at my door! After watching a movie on my laptop to stay awake till the right time-zone, I finally fell asleep for the first time in 31 hours.

I slept well and transitioned time-zones quickly. After a rather nice breakfast

buffet at the hotel I walked the cold 5-minutes to work to find that very few people are in the office this early. Many people get in between 10-11. This is my kind of workplace. I met with the boss and got a place to sit, and started working. Eventually I got a tour around and met most people in the office, everyone was very nice and the office is very modern. I got along well with my colleagues, they all spoke English and we were able to make a lot of progress.

8 of us went out for lunch at a local shopping mall in a traditional German restaurant where most of us got beer (I had a dunkelweiss) and some nice food. Germans really consider beer something to eat, it is part of the meal here which is a refreshing attitude. I had a pancake soup (strips of thin pancake in a yellow tasty broth) and a weisswurst with mustard. Turns out when you eat weisswurst you're supposed to take off the skins of the sausage, which is a little tricky if you're at a business lunch and not trying to look awkward. It was good, especially with the special mustard. Work progressed well, and a couple of guys worked late with me till about 8pm when we finally made a first milestone of connection between our





software. In celebration, and general kindness on their parts, they took me to a nice festival called Tollwood held on the Oktoberfest grounds. Some vendors of food and craft are in heated tents, others are outside in the cold, but it is a lively and well decorated place with many glügwine and food vendors around and young people out socializing in stylish coats and hats. While walking around talking and eating some sushi I tried some new drinks: a nice glugwine (warm, lightly spiced red wine), some Feuerzangenbowle (a highly alcoholic, flaming wine-like drink), and a warm mead (which was really great!). I also got some kind of fried apple fritter with cinnamon sugar which is a traditional Bavarian snack and was very warming. We headed home on the train and I got dropped off at the hotel for some sleep.

I got up a little later the next day, getting to work around 10 after a leisurely breakfast and still beating many locals to the office. For lunch we went out to an Italian place with decent food, and of course a beer. They were nice to help me order, although ordering “number 6” in German wouldn’t have been too hard. Apparently starting in 2008, Barvaria and much of the rest of Germany will not allow smoking in restaurants, but traditionally this is part of German culture. One of my colleagues likes to smoke after lunch, I guess others aren’t sad to see it go so this was quite a subject of debate while telling him to “savor” those last

cigarettes. We worked kind of late into the afternoon (~7), but after work most people in the office attended a “baby watching” party with one of their colleagues who recently had a baby, so I was on my own. I headed home to put on some warmer clothes and get my maps, and embarked downtown again. Although I was hoping to have dinner at the Andechser am Dom, it was quite packed and I didn’t feel like trying to communicate in German about a waiting list if that is how they organize things. I stopped at the nearby



Augustiner am Dom, also right next to the famous Frauenkirche church, for some sauerbraten. I had a few of their beers, a dunkel which was good but uninspiring, an excellent Edelstorf which is a little stronger version of their Helles (or light), and a kirchwasser which is a cherry-flavored schnapps. Good beers, but a little different than the others I’ve had. Apparently Augustiner is the local’s favorite, although the differences between the various beers I tried was small.



After dinner, feeling in need of some fresh air after the smoky restaurant, I wandered around looking at some of the Christmas market vendor carts. I kept wandering after the carts shut down, getting slightly lost. Eventually I found my way back to the Hofbrau, which being a bit later in the day this time was full of revelry. I sat down for a bit to warm up next to a table of drunken Italians, who were rather entertaining. Soon I headed home, although with the train-ride home I ended up being out till midnight.

I followed my usual routine on Wednesday. Lunch was at a Greek place that we walked to, with big portions, beer, and free shots of Ouzo for us all before and after the meal! We joked that after the beer and ouzo perhaps the afternoon was better suited for meetings. After eating half the huge plate, I gave up – I think the waitress thought I didn't like it, she

seemed insulted even though I told her I was full. One of the guys said the salad was too big which got us all laughing. The chilly walk back to the office building was nice to stretch out and chat freely with my colleagues. Since I was flying out on Thursday, this would be my last day of work, so we needed to focus and had a meeting to discuss the plan for the day.

Although we hadn't accomplished everything we hoped, the afternoon went well and we wrapped things up to get to our 8:30 reservations in the west side of the city. It was a very nice place for dinner with cozy but stark atmosphere, small plates, and many courses. We ordered a nice bottle of a local red wine with the 5 course meal. The food was excellent and quite unique, this was a special place. It's fun to experience the culture of a



place this way! After dinner we all headed for home, I got a ride back to the hotel from the train station for some more sleep. I managed to pack all the souvenirs with reasonable padding, my bags were sure heavier by now.

Thursday morning I was starting to feel a cold coming on, I had noticed the symptoms the previous day as well. Although slogging my bags up and down flights of stairs to change trains was no picnic I made it to the airport with time to spare and do a little

shopping in duty-free with the remaining Euros I had in my wallet. This time I got better seats, and the connection in Chicago was ok. It is amazing how many times I had to go through security-type stations in Chicago, although I had already been through 3 in



Munich before I left (passport control, security, then US security). I went through US customs handing them a form, picked up my checked luggage to walk it through US agricultural, dropped off my bag again after re-packing, then went back out to the airport to go through US security again. Whew..! Having a cold didn't make flying any fun though.

I arrived into Portland, but again they didn't have my checked luggage, this time I'm at home so it didn't matter much. Debbie picked me up with an excited Charlie in the car and I went straight to bed. They delivered the bag to our doorstep that night.

While I'm still recovering from the cold, the trip was great. I'm glad to have had the opportunity to go, especially on a business trip where I could hang out with locals even if I only had evenings free. I had quite an array of experiences in a short trip!