

The Great Irish Adventure

To all you lovely people who knew about our crazy adventure, just wanted to let you know we made it here. And for those who have time to read on, here's the tale...

It all started on a foggy day in Alameda, 7th of Sep. My parents drove us to the airport, with 4 bags, 2 cats, 2 carryons, and a violin (naturally!) We located cargo, checked in the cats (had to bore extra holes in one of the carriers!) and then trekked along to the terminal. Once checked in, we found the international terminal spa and treated ourselves to a massage (well, one of Dan's brother's friends worked there and his mum gave us money to go!) Once on the plane, we played with the inflight system that Virgin does so well. I watched Friends & Father Ted, and Dan beat all the games and watched 4 movies.

We arrived in London, Heathrow on the very sunny, hot morning of the 8th. Dan's best mate, Nick, met us and drove us to meet the cats. Everywhere, there were signs saying it might be 4 hours before the process was completed. Little did we know that it actually would! Nicks' wife, in Wales, was due any minute, and we were pretty pressed for time. First, they made us wait for an hour before calling anyone from the airline to help us. Then we had to fill out a customs form again which they'd lost from our papers. The whole time, we were in this conservatory that was BOILING and I was sitting under the air conditioner to keep from passing out. Finally, the ultimate insult: a lady that had a dog on the same flight waltzed in, announced her arrival, and got her dog in about 10 minutes! We were told it's much harder to get cats in their carriers than dogs on a leash. 20 minutes later (under 4 hours by 15 minutes, which was pointed out to us) we had the frightened kitties. We were not so impressed by the little gifts of red Virgin kitty mice and tags for their collars and pet passports.

We stopped for a bite (ugg--Burger King) and drove hell-bent for Wales. Luckily, Ellen didn't deliver that day, and we had the pleasure of meeting their oldest, Millie (2 years old), who's an absolute DOLL with little blond curls & big blue eyes. We loved staying with them, their cat, Pip, and their 3 chickens. (Yes, coincidence? I wonder...)

Our next trip involved driving up to visit the aunties in Liverpool--about 4 or 5 hours away. On the other side of the road, in a manual transmission. We only had one scary moment when we were driving late at night into Liverpool and the streets were fairly empty. Dan turned into the wrong lane at a T intersection, luckily noticing the mistake quickly! The car needed two new tires because of a bulge in one, and there was definitely something dodgy about the brakes. When we pulled up the handbrake, it sometimes wouldn't go up and other times, wouldn't release. We also noticed that if we didn't have it on, but tried to back up an incline, it would catch on. This happened, much to Dan's chagrin, getting on and off the ferry to Ireland. The garages over here are fairly overloaded though, and couldn't see us for the brakes in time. We had a ticket for the Irish ferry on 15th Sept. Which turned out to be the day that Ellen delivered a fine, big boy! We are his godparents. YAY!

We met up with Dan's dad in Dundalk, Ireland on the afternoon of the 15th. We drove over to Carlingford to get to our short-term accomodation, a lovely converted stone barn, with our wonderful landlord, Seamus. He started by feeding us that afternoon and progressed to helping us find proper housing and negotiate the various accounts we had to set up. We are now in a terrific 4 bedroom/2.5 bath closer to Dundalk. It's about 30 min walk away and 5-10 min. drive.

We took the bus into Dublin almost every other day to see about the container of our stuff. (And to see a fabulous production of Winter's Tale!) It was a mad circular mess. The trucking company needed a shipping release and customs clearance. Customs wanted the shipping release, 2 utility bills from here, two from the States, and two paychecks from the States. Shipping just wanted money for the shipping release. Just today, I got another bill from them for the same release! We

sorted it all out and have our stuff now. We managed with the help of one of Dan's cousins and a couple of students from the college nearby. They seem very nice, when they're not setting off fireworks or "rallying" (like sideshows) at all hours of the night!

Dan has a job with SmartHome (on the web, www.smarthomes.ie) as a foreman, with the likelihood of a project manager's position in a couple of months. He started today, which is how I had time to write all this! I am taking care of the rest of our accounts and unpacking MORE boxes.

Before I left, I compiled a short list of things various folks thought we wouldn't find over here. With one exception, I've found them all:

Peanut butter
Dried cranberries (I just haven't looked hard enough)
All night laundromats
Mexican food
Tequila
Trader Joes (called Aldi's over here)

I have a new list of Things I didn't know I'd miss:

Built-in closets (Yes, it's an on-going saga of "The Kitty, the Other Kitty and the Wardrobe")
Recycling (One big bin for only paper & tin cans. Glass & plastic drink container can be dumped at a "Bring" center. Everything else you pay 1 euro to get into the recycling center.)
Tom's of Maine toothpaste
Dan says--Hot links

Well, this is getting very long, but you're all welcome to stop reading at any point.:) Hope this helps to let you know what we've been up to, aside from the weekly farmer's market and "Farmer Rocket" but I have to save something for another letter!!

Much Love,
Heather & Dan