

Right, here we are again. Its completely odd and in ways that I hadn't expected. In many ways its just like we left yesterday, mind you we both haven't started work yet maybe the differences will be more apparent when life is a bit more routine.

Routine is not a word I would use to describe the last month. Its been completely crazy. I am super glad we didn't just come back for three weeks or I really would want a holiday after my holiday, but I am getting ahead of myself.

We set off from Wellington at the beginning of May. I had forgotten to check in beforehand so Steph and I were not sitting together, a mistake I didn't make again. The woman next to me asked if I flew a lot, I said I hadn't really flown any distance for a couple of years. Looking back I don't think I realised how far we were about to fly.

Steph got to see Liz and Andrew's new house. Andrew maintains that as its just made out of wood that its really just the most expensive garden shed he has ever bought. I think it's a very nice house. It's a great space and they have room to spread out and New Lynn is a proper place with its own shops and restaurants. We haven't been to Auckland a lot and its nice to go and see it. It is a proper big city, pretty much the only one in New Zealand.

We sat on the front and ate fish (red snapper) and chips in the sparkling autumn sun and then headed off for a northern summer.

We are flying across the Pacific for our first leg. The UK is pret-

ty much the other side of the world so it does not make any difference which way round we do it. Air New Zealand is apparently an award winning airline, I didn't really know this but the flight was really quite good, the food especially edible. Steph was enjoying one of her birthday presents. She had lamented that she would not be able to progress with her jumper even though she had lots of time because obviously you cannot take knitting needles on a plane. I'd wondered if that really was true, and when I looked it up it turns out that both Homeland Security and the UK Government specifically allowed knitting needles. The only problem now is that she is now knitting the front and the pattern calls for her to measure it against the back, this is a bit of a problem as the back is still in New Zealand.

Two and a half hours out we had a medical emergency and needed to land at the nearest airport. It turns out that after two and a half hours of flight the nearest airport was still Auckland, so back we went. They did turn us around quickly, but we are now six hours late and our 12 hour flight was now an 18 hour flight. We had missed our connections, but it wasn't the end of the world, it was our medical emergency.

Texas, the great shopping opportunity. We had travelled with pretty empty bags with a





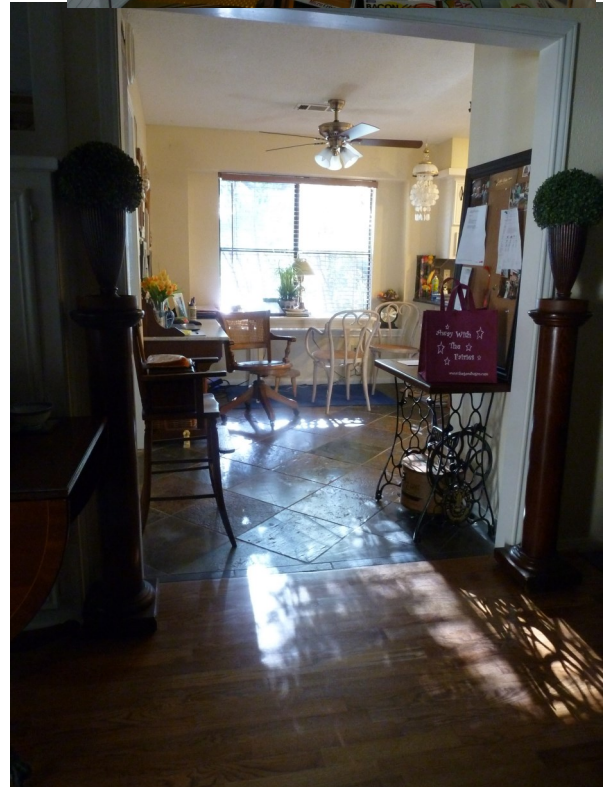


view to filling them here in the US. My sister Bunny was only too happy to help out with the shopping, being a shopping queen herself. We pretty soon filled the space in our bags with cloths and shoes, shoes and more shoes. Steph has even got new walking boots of



finest leather for trekking in Laos.

The original plan had been to visit Bunny for Christmas when they lived in Perth. So somewhat bizarrely we were going to have Christmas in Texas in May, by the pool complete with Santa and an inflatable turkey (decorative not for eating).



We zig zagged across the Atlantic to the UK. We were trying to optimise catching up with people. So we stopped off with Paul, Iona, Corin and Taryn. I guess it's the children that we notice the passage of time in the most. Corin and Taryn are both growing up and develop-







ing into real people. We were treated to musical recitals, I do find it intriguing to watch people acquiring skills that I plainly don't have. Paul is nervously hoping the City don't manage to make a mess of the title.

Part of the zig zag takes us to Germany and to see the Andi and Onder who are now

newlywed. It is a strange start to the holiday as its hard to gauge how much out of the loop we have got because all the people we are meeting so far are people we would normally only see every three or four years anyway.

Germany in spring is very pretty. Its green and lush. We potter and catch up. Again Jamal has been growing he now drives an ambulance and amazingly I think his English is even better than it was last time. How





do people hang onto a language they only use every couple of years?

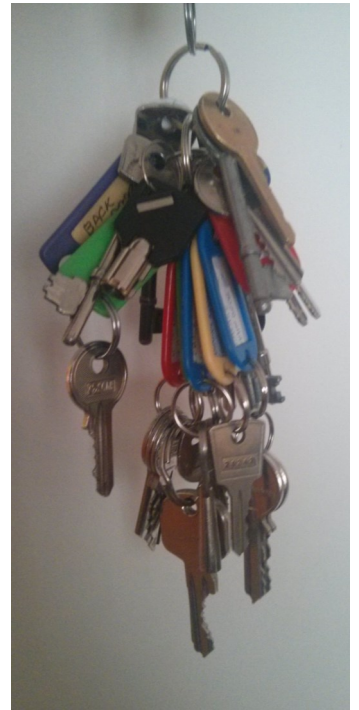
We spend some time on the internet trying to organise jobs and agents and accountants etc. It's a strange sort of holiday so far, Steph describes it as a slow whirlwind.

Manchester, at last. We have a bed that will be ours for longer than a couple of days. Thanks Roger, it is very much appreciated.

Manchester in spring is also surprisingly sunny. We are slowly sliding back into the patterns from a precious life. We play badminton; I go out for lunch with ex-colleagues.

We use our unexpected extra days to get more things done, eye tests, checking that our hose is still standing, it is and we have more keys for it than I remember, visiting the very stunning Manchester library etc.

We did get back to see Mum just as she had a little fall and need some time in hospital. A slightly different first weekend in Manchester than the one we were planning,





but its nice to feel useful.

Lindsey did point out that in some ways that it was like we had



never left and in others we were completely different, Steph did not know where Heywood was any more (where we play badminton) and I appear to have come out for lunch wearing sandals and no coat and not it

is raining hard.



Now the first phase is drawing to a close. We are both back at work this week so there will be less time for doing things in the week but we should get more of a perspective on UK life.



It's a bit strange, I am only going to be there for a few weeks but I find myself as nervous as if it was a permanent job.

Anyway, its an odd thing to write. Half the

readers were there and don't need me to tell them what happened and the other half have no idea who these people are, I hope it makes some kind of sense for everyone.