

I think I mentioned that Steph said we would be away from the house for 70% of this year and I even foolishly thought I understood what that meant. In a way I guess it didn't become completely apparent until we got back home, which we did at the end of September. We had been away house sitting and travelling in NZ before we went back to Europe for four months. Well they say that you don't really miss something until its not there but actually I didn't really miss being at home until we got back and all of a sudden all the projects we wanted to get done need to be done pronto, because we need to be ready to leave again when we are off to Australia in November. It is odd to meet friends, and as they are also going away, we met up briefly and ended by saying we would see each other next year.

The time in Europe was lovely. I've heard the term "slow tourism" and I wondered if we would be doing that this time. Actually the way it worked out we ended up having quite chilled and relaxed periods interspersed with some frantic activity, and that mixture seemed to work out fine



for us. However long we are away for at some point in the break we start to look forward to going home, this time it was when we were over three month in, and there were around three

weeks left. It made me think that three weeks was the entire length of time we would be here when we both worked, now that was frantic.

The chilled and relaxed patches were never present when we worked and I suppose that they were all the more obvious and valued this time. I have managed to get into the rhythm of baking my own bread at home and while we were traveling I wanted to try and keep it up. However it was not really practical to bring my bread maker so I had to try and make it by hand. I think I managed to get the hang of it, a loaf would take around three to four hours,



not continual work but I needed to be around. It contributed to the relaxed pace. I did learn to be more flexible with my recipe,

having to do without equipment that I would have taken for granted in some of our kitchens. Including in the Air BnB in Scotland only being able to find a measuring jug and having to use the internet to find the density of flour so I could turn millilitres into grams, amazingly the bread turned out OK.

We spent the week around Steph's birthday in France looking after Jiji and dog and Mira the cat. The pattern for the day was Steph would get up at 7:30 and took Jiji for an early morning walk. Although the days were quite hot Steph needed a jumper in the chill of the morning, then we would have breakfast by the pool and then we opened and cleaned the pool. During the day we would make bread, cut the grass, walk to the lo-





cal village for a beer on Friday and cards on Monday, cycle to more remote villages for coffee. We learnt that there is a whole heap of difference between the Google description of “mostly flat” and “moderate hills”. The evening were trying new (to us) streamed TV with the animals and a glass of wine. All in all quite an idyllic oasis in the trip.



We managed to get across to near the alps to see Meg, who I worked with in Wellington, it was a holiday when we met lots of people who we knew from NZ. It was lovely to see where she had moved to and





meet up with her and her mum in the house in a little village surrounded by olive trees.

We also got to do some walking in Scotland, where we met up with Pat and Tim in the Spey Valley on the way to Aberdeen, I remember we stayed over for one night in the past. This time it we had time to chat and do some walking. We also had time to walk in Yorkshire and catch up with Steph's brother and even decorate the house with bunting for the village summer fete, bunting delivered and approved by the organising committee. Having time to sit and talk to people was very welcome and having enough space and time to let conversations take their natural course.

And then there were some times when we needed to be hastier. For example we had a four day gap between tenants



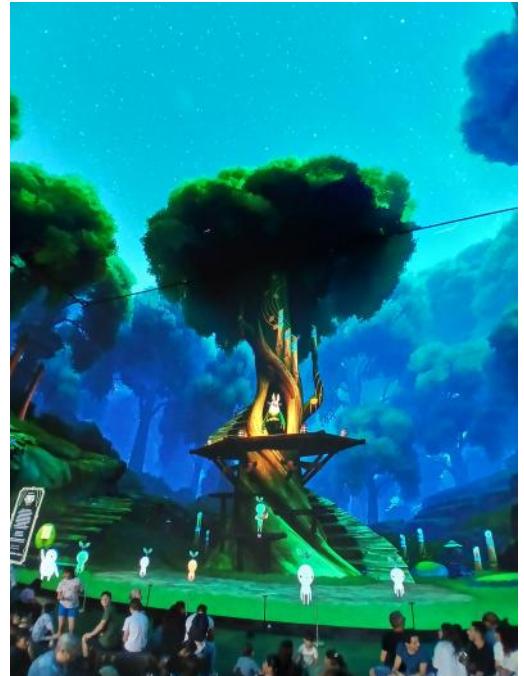
in the flat we rent out and we decided that the place could do with a fresh coat of paint, it hadn't been painted since we bought it 15 years ago. We had some fantastic help from Chris and Russ and Caroline and got the weird experience of living in the flat for the four days. Days full of painting and then cards in the evening. We did get everything painted and all light-bulbs replaced in time, weary people wandered out to the Wetherspoons on Oxford Road for a celebratory pint and a bag of crisps. Living the dream.

We had city breaks in London, where we had been before so we had plans, and Glasgow where we hadn't and we had recommendations. Both worked out very well.

I don't think I could live in London, it was a little like being shouted at for a week but we saw Lenny Henry in a play called "Every Brilliant Thing" and "Girl from the North



"Country" at the Old Vic. We also got to go to Outernet a very strange space sort of a digital performance space, four stories high, the largest LED screens in the world apparently, and the V&A museum's new storage facility in Stratford sort of a cross between a museum and a warehouse. I treated myself to a new second hand camera from Tottenham Court Road. Then we walked around the Sunday markets and took photos all day and visited both roof gardens on Fenchurch Street and ate in Tooting Market. There really is everything in London, so much to do that we had to make sure we didn't put too much in each day. We al-



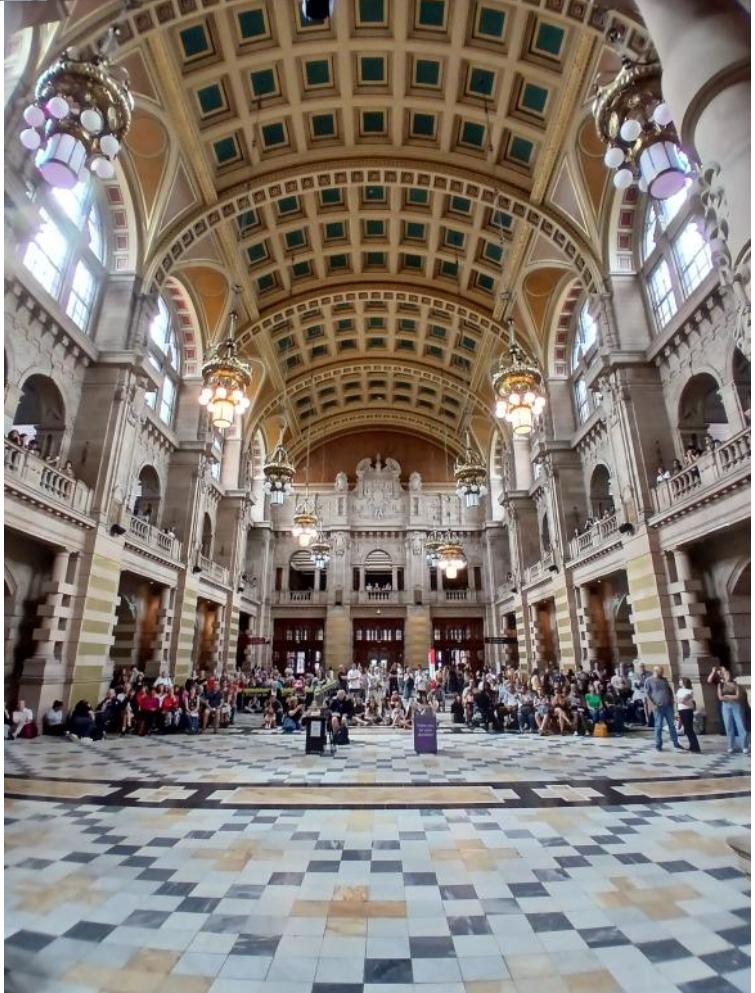


so got to look after Kimchi the cat and were introduced to The Traitors on TV. It wasn't all rush we did have a day to walk along the canals in London, thanks Tim for not get-



ting us lost and for finding a lovely pub before we scooted off to the Proms.

Glasgow was all art galleries and Mackintosh and Botanical Gardens and also rain, we hadn't really seen rain in two months but it looked like Glasgow had been saving it for us. We also got time for a side trip to the Falkirk Wheel



and the Kelpies, including a tour inside the ridiculously oversized sculptures.

When we were on our own we mainly cooked for ourselves, in our frantic phases we ate out lots. Sometimes when we have been back eating out can be a bit meh, which is such a disappointment. This time we had a lot of very good food. Excellent calamari in St Ives, the best





chocolate bomb I've ever had at the Ivy in Wimbeldon, thank you John, afternoon tea far above Manchester in Cloud 23 with Jenny. Steph had her belated birthday meal in Hotel Europe, the last time we were there it was smoky pub (20 years ago) now its rather swish. A very enjoyable lunch while Simon recounted being evacuated from New Caledonia. We had lovely tapas lunch in Chorlton and of course pizza

and rose on a sunny Friday evening in the alps with Meg. Our team from PwC try to meet up when I am back and its an enjoyable evening. Of the four of us Liam and I no

longer work but the other two were still at PwC. This summer they were "offered" voluntary redundancy, so another chapter ends but hopefully we will still meet up for enjoyable evenings.

Of course all this needed planning, lots of planning and in amongst whatever else was going on we had to try and keep ahead of ourselves with car hire and accommodation restaurants and airline and train tickets.

Its a strange place to visit, the UK, for us. Its not quite a holiday in the regular sense of the word. When we go to other places we get the wonder of discovering a new place, in the UK we do already know the place quite well but in some ways its better as we get to reconnect with friends. Play badminton and go for a beer afterwards.



Go and see Lancashire play some not very good cricket in Blackpool. Go to the Minac theatre perched above the English Channel. Sit it a beautiful kitchen chatting



with Cliff and Jo while they cook for us. Have a barbecue with Brian and Claire and comparing dysfunctional families. Steph got to paddle board while Simon and I went to the pub.

Bizarrely we managed to blend NZ and the UK by meeting up lovely kiwi friends Jie and Emma and Kayla in London and showing Linda and Regan around my home city of Manchester.

It was good to see how the UK has changed, some city are being regenerated, with the city being set up for meeting up and entertainment rather than shops. It was good to be able to shop for things we cannot get but in the end I was happy to be heading home back to walking on the beach and a very chilled and relaxed life on the Kapiti coast.

