

# ALAINA'S ADVENTURE ABROAD

Six Travel Blog Excerpts

29th AUG 2012

## Sand in my Suitcase

People talk about how the world is so connected through technology nowadays. I agree, only I don't measure it that way. I gauge it by the sand in my suitcase. How often I've unintentionally brought home sand from other places. It lurks in the bottom of my suitcase. In some random pocket of my backpack. In my underwear. No matter how many times I've tried dumping it out!

It is unbelievable to me that in no more than a month's time, I've made it out to the west coast of the United States, back to Buffalo, out to the East coast of the U.S., back to Buffalo and finally to near the northern coast of Poland and managed to dump out sand from California from the bottom of my suitcase. And my Polish hosts tell me I live near sand dunes, so I'll probably have to pay an extra baggage fee on the way home, because I'm assuming one of those dunes will somehow, behind my back, end up in my luggage.

Speaking of baggage fees, you have no idea what I went through to make it to my final destination! But that is what this blog is for, so I will begin.

1 SEP 2012

## THE BUZZ

I hate mosquitoes. I think if I ate raw garlic and covered myself in mud, they would still find me.

29 SEP 2012

## THE BUZZ

Horrid dissonant chorus with chords never resolving. Fifty of them! I counted one day. (What else would one do in the bathroom?) Ten mosquitoes on each of the four walls and ceiling. I've only been bitten twice in this month. I guess they don't like American cuisine. I wish they would leave, though. They came in when the door to my apartment had to be left open nine hours a day, so the construction workers could use the bathroom. Oddly, they lift their back legs and wave them around like antennae trying to make satellite connection when they are resting on the walls. Their snouts are also half the size of American mosquitoes' snouts. (Proboscises, I suppose.) They like to fly at my head sometimes, a few at a time, humming their terribly out-of-tune mosquito-monk meditations. I just blow at them and they know their place. Back on the walls.

17th NOV 2012

## Mystery Meat Pizza (Solved!)

When you live with four kids, you don't always get to eat all of your leftover pizza. At least for me, it is difficult to take the first bite when multiple pairs of eyes are staring at the piece of freshly re-baked pizza on it's way up to my mouth. I close my jaw and then ask, "Do you want some?" "Yes, I want!" they answer. So I divvy up my pizza and eat the bit that's left. They each peel off various vegetables and toss them back on my plate because I said I'd eat veggies they didn't like. "I want more!" they say. "How about I make pizza for dinner?"

So started the adventure. I took chicken and homegrown tomato guts out of the freezer to thaw. I decided to make mini-bread-pizzas. I pureed beets and added to the first batch of sauce to help thicken it, cut the acidity and get them to eat more veggies. But, since it was magenta, I figured they would know. So I made a traditional tomato sauce, too. (So the sauce options were: sweet garlic or salty tomato.) I actually liked the magenta sauce the best!

Then, the meat. (Notice I said meat.) I thought I took out chicken. But I wasn't sure. I asked Adam, "Is this chicken? Is it organ meats?" and he said, "Chicken breast. Or pork. I don't know. We'll find out!" After it thawed, I boiled it in water, took it off the bones and thought it was quite chewy and thought, "How strange that it would get overcooked that quickly." I also noticed that the cuts looked slightly different, but I thought I had identified the wings and thighs. "Well, I'd better make it smaller." That will solve the texture problem. Making stuff smaller fixes everything. Sure. So I added water, flour and shredded it in the Thermomix (the appliance to replace all other appliances). Finally, I heated it slowly in a pan with a hint of barbeque "sos."

Adam came back home and I told him my texture issue solution. He said, "Is is rabbit?" "What?" That hadn't crossed my mind. I'd only eaten rabbit one time at a restaurant and never cooked it before. But it all came together as my eyes widened. "I think you're right!" I said. "There was a larger single vertebra and what I thought were wings were probably..."

Rabbit pizza.

Yep. With beet sauce. And goat cheese!

And guess what? It was DELICIOUS. Everybody ate it! (You know you've passed the true test when all of the kids eat it.) ; )

17th NOV 2012

## Soup Talk

After Mass, I stopped at the pedestrian square car park because they had eight tanks and trucks from World War II. I confirmed this through one of the Straż (Firefighters) who knew English. (Found out he was the older brother of one of my middle school girls!) The Straż were handing out free zupa! (soup!) It was good, traditional Polish soup with carrots, onions, potatoes, bits of parsley, and of course, kiełbasa. Three old men invited me to share their garbage-can-table and I obliged.

As soon as they tried to engage me in conversation, I said, “Nie rozumiem. Nie mówie po polsku.” (I don’t understand. I can’t speak Polish.) ”Do you know any English?” “Nie, nie!” they said. So I used about five Polish words and they used about one English word and we managed to have a conversation for twenty minutes! Lots of gesturing. Finally, we cheated and asked the friendly Straż man to translate a few things for us. I was proud of myself for actually being able to figure out most of it before that. “Ah, Obama! Obama jest czarny.” (Obama is black.) “Yes,” I said. ”Krzysztof Columbus! Krzysztof...” (Christopher Columbus discovered America and he was from Poland.) I disagreed with both and Pan Straż explained why.

Despite that, this man with the big nose invited me to have a 2nd bowl of free soup. “Nie, dziękuję,” I said. (No thank you.) I was full! They made me eat it. The Straż lady and the man with the big nose made me. But it made for more attempted conversation and it was still good soup!

Finally, I said, “Idę.” (I go.) So the man wiped his soup and garbage-can-lid-bread hands on his mouth, shirt, pants and back on his mouth, then reached out to shake my hand for the second time and kiss me on both cheeks for the third time. (Too bad I’d already showered.) I think I must have made this man’s day. : )

On the way home, about three minutes after I’d left the car park, all eight World War II vehicles were driving down the cobblestone road with families riding in them like a little parade. I stood on the bridge over the Łeba River and waved back at them.

14th FEB 2013

## Wieliczka Salt Mine

“A labyrinth containing almost 2,400 chambers connected by corridors measuring a total length of 245 km (155 miles)”

My English tour group was comprised of 1 Polish man, 2 people from China, 1 from Portugal, 2 from Iran, 2 from Hungary and myself. :) We walked down a total of 800 steps and were over 100 meters underground! (We took a lift on the way up though, thank goodness.) We'd only covered 3 of the 9 levels, and not even in their entirety.

We were amazed by the underground world of saline sculptures and reliefs and the healing microclimate. (They actually have the Underground Health Resort 135 m underground.) The chapel was gorgeous! Even the 300-some crystals on each chandelier were made of salt. The entire altar and everything on it was made of salt. The stairs and floor tiles in multiple chambers were made of salt.

Salt preserves wood, so much of it looked like new. But if a chamber had a moisture problem, we couldn't go in it and breathe or touch sculptures, because they would dissolve.

You can schedule balls, concerts, banquets, weddings, conferences and business meetings underground. "Deep down underground and always at the highest standards." How could you resist?

View my full travel blog [here](#).