

Lynne & Steve Funck May 4 to 25, 2023
Spain

Greetings from Casablanca Airport! 5:25 a.m. in MD, 10:25 a.m. here.

Yes, we're traveling again!

I wasn't paying attention to the boarding last night, Steve noticed that there was a line at our gate, so I went over and asked - yes, they were boarding our plane! I thought we were boarding at 9:30 but that was take-off time. So we got in line - our seats were towards the back, so it didn't matter. We flew Royal Air Maroc.

We could see Baltimore as we flew past, over Delaware and southern New Jersey. We saw the moon for a minute before the plane turned. There was turbulence for the first hour and a half and the last hour and a half, mostly smooth in the middle. We got dinner at 10:30 p.m., fish for him, chicken and onions for me. There was also a dish with some sort of beans which was delicious. We tried to sleep, but really can't sleep well in an airplane in economy seating.

At 2:30 a.m. we got a long narrow box (maybe 2.5" x 8") with raspberry yogurt, a blueberry muffin, and ham and cheese on a small roll.

We had to bus from the airplane to the airport building. We had to go through security again - this time there was a line from our plane, but I had a can of coke that went through in my bag, so security rules have changed. I found a magnet from Morocco, will now look again at the few shops. Our plane to Madrid doesn't leave until 3:30 so we will be here for a while.

Greetings from Hotel Europa in Madrid! 10 p.m. (6 hours earlier in Baltimore)

Well, I took several walks around the airport, didn't buy anything else. We bought 2 sandwiches for lunch, had the coke leftover from the airplane. Steve had to charge his cell phone - there weren't very many charging stations in the airport.

We got in line a little after 3 to board the next airplane. At 3:35 they finally started boarding our plane, which was the time they were supposed to close the gate. Eventually we all got on. The plane next to ours was supposed to leave for Barcelona 5 minutes after ours and it left much before ours - it started check in when it was supposed to. We received another long box an hour before we landed - it contained vanilla yogurt, tuna salad on a larger roll than this morning, and a chocolate cupcake. We had very little turbulence this flight. It was sunny.

We arrived at the Madrid airport, had to show that we had a passport (but not the inside), then went up long escalators (maybe 4 or 5 flights on each), then down some, had to go back up to find where to buy train tickets, took an escalator down to the tracks, weren't sure it was the right one, so up again, then down when we found it was right. We chatted with a couple from London (escaping the folderol in London this week) as we rode 4 stops on the train, transferred to another train, arrived in central Madrid. Our hotel is just a block from the train station.

We got our room, then walked up the street, looking for something to eat. I'm sure that being so tired (being awake for 38 hours) is making me hungry. So we had a fourth meal - we found a restaurant which sold tapas - we ordered a plate of paella and a plate of egg omelet - should have ordered just one, not both - we split them and are very full. Hopefully we will be able to sleep now.

It was sunny and 24 degrees centigrade (about 77 Fahrenheit I think) in Madrid.

Hope your day was good.

Please keep us in your prayers for continuing safety and good health. We thank God for keeping us safe and working everything out for us these 2 days.

God bless you.
Lynne and Steve



Over Morocco - the early crops look good!



Town on the way to Casablanca



The edge of Morocco on the Mediterranean Sea on the way to Madrid



5/5 in Madrid, Porto del Sol, Famous sign on building next to our hotel



Plaza Mayor, this building was once home to the bakers guild



Philip III made this square, Plaza Mayor, the centerpiece of the building capital in 1619



Carnivale at base of a light



Typical building

On Puerto del Sol, the symbol of Madrid, a bear eating the berries of a madrono tree.



Half way through our meal, I remembered to take a photo - veal cutlet and artichoke with ham



San Geronimo Church up the hill next to Prado Museum. Isn't the sky pretty?

5/5

Good Day!

Congratulations to my niece/Goddaughter Rebekah on her graduation day as she receives her Master of Library Science degree today!

We slept mostly ok. I awoke at 4 a.m., took a couple of hours to get back to sleep, then we slept until 10 a.m. We were tired!

We took the Historic Core Walk in Madrid. Rick Steves writes how to see places in European countries and we followed his advice.

We started in the Puerta del Sol, a block from our hotel entrance. It is the center of Madrid and of Spain. The gate of the sun is no longer standing. The square is a totally pedestrian space. The black statue of a bear pawing a madrono tree has been a symbol of Madrid since medieval times. The county governor's office, home to the "president" who governs greater Madrid, is on the square. In front of the office is "kilometer zero", the symbolic center of Spain. Opposite the office is the famous Tio Pepe sign which advertises a local sherry wine since the 1930s. All the buildings circling the square are yellow-cream, 4 stories, balconies of iron, and have shuttered windows.

We walked a couple of blocks to Plaza Mayor. This was Madrid's main square in the 1600s. Philip III's statue reminds that this square was the centerpiece of the budding capital in 1619. The square's buildings are mainly private apartments, costing from about \$450,000 for a tiny attic studio to \$2 million and up for a 2,500 -square-foot flat. Many cartoon characters roamed the square.

We wandered through Mercado de San Miguel, full of high-end vendors of fresh produce, gourmet food, wine, tapas, and full meals. As it was full noon it was extremely crowded. We went into the Church of Corpus Christi, absolutely deserted! It was a place to sit down and rest for a few minutes! As we walked on, we passed the Former Town Hall on a square which was the ruling center of medieval Madrid in the centuries before it became an important capital.

We went to Almudena Cathedral which opened in 1993, 100 years after workers started building it. When Pope John Paul II consecrated Almudena in 1993, that ended Madrid's 300 year stretch of requests for a cathedral of its own. It has a 5,000-pipe organ. The church's historic highlight is a 13th century coffin made of painted leather on wood, depicting scenes of cows, horses, and strolling people. It once held Madrid's patron saint, Isidro, a humble farmer, very devout, once visited by angels. They agreed to plow his fields so he could devote himself to praying. When he died, he was buried in this coffin. 40 years later the coffin was opened and his body was perfectly

preserved. This miracle convinced the pope to canonize Isidro. He is now the patron saint of farmers and of the city of Madrid.

We passed the Royal Palace, then walked through the Plaza de Oriente (facing east). All the traffic is underground so most of our walk has been in pedestrian zones. We saw the statue of Philip IV and walked past the Royal Theater. We continued walking back to Puerta del Sol, found the statue of the black bear pawing a madrono tree, a symbol of Madrid since medieval times. The madrono trees produce a very that makes the traditional madrono liqueur.

Then went to our room and sat for a few minutes. Then we went looking for something to eat. El Manantial was just up the street - I said I wanted to eat outside in the shade and this restaurant had an empty table under an umbrella and it was a short walk away. We shared a veal cutlet and artichokes with ham (the ham was diced on top of the artichoke). It was good.

We returned to our room to rest for a while. I started this letter. I noticed that the Prado Museum was free after 6 o'clock, so we walked about 15 minutes to the Prado. The line was longer than the building (at least 3 blocks) but moving fairly well. We were probably in line for 20 minutes. But we got in to see the Prado! It has over 3,000 canvases painted by the European masters. Most of the paintings were portraits or people groups, very few landscapes. We saw many of the works of the Spanish painters - El Greco, Valazquez, and Goya. We were only in there for about an hour and a half, but that was enough for us (and our feet!).

As we walked home we saw a Churrero shop. I had a caprese empanada, he had a chorizo y quest empanada. I also got some fresh-made churros - they will be our bedtime snack. We continued walking back to our hotel. I walked 5.6 miles yesterday (mostly in the Casablanca airport) and we walked 5.8 miles (13,975 steps) today. Now we're sitting on our beds with our legs on the beds, resting.

It was sunny, 79, very pleasant today!

Thank you to all who wrote encouraging words and promises to pray for us. We pray that God will bless you.

God bless you.

Lynne and Steve



Almudena Cathedral dedicated in 1993 by Pope John Paul II, 100 years after building was started



A group of seminarians was being taught around the altar



The Transfiguration



13th century coffin made of painted leather on wood, depicting scenes of cows, horses, and strolling people. It once held Madrid's patron saint, Isidro, a humble farmer, very devout, once visited by angels. They agreed to plow his fields so he could devote himself to praying. When he died, he was buried in this coffin. 40 years later the coffin was opened and his body was perfectly preserved. This miracle convinced the pope to canonize Isidro. He is now the patron saint of farmers and of the city of Madrid.



Plaza de Oriente. Statue of Philip IV was a striking technical feat in its day, as the horse rears back dramatically balanced atop its fragile ankles (and its tail!).



The missing photo of the bear. Sorry, I accidentally deleted it, then forgot to put it back in.

On Puerto del Sol, the symbol of Madrid, a bear eating the berries of a madrono tree.



From the train between Madrid and Granada



Olive orchards???



Farm fields



Steve on our first floor (in Europe the ground floor is floor 0), watching the marathon

May 6

Greetings from the high speed train between Madrid and Granada!
3:07 p.m.

We slept until after 9 this morning - we rarely sleep later than 7:30, but I guess losing so much sleep is still affecting us! We packed, then went down to the lobby. We checked out, then sat in the lobby with our laptop open to the Coronation. We didn't have to get up early to see it, like you did in America, if you did. Steve decided he would rather see that than more of Madrid now.

We took the subway one stop, then walked through the station, trying to find out where our train was. After asking several people, we finally arrived at the correct place. Many train tracks on many levels and not just above but far to the side. We had to put our luggage through the security machine, then waited in line to get checked in, finally taking a slanted escalator (it doesn't form steps but goes up or down at a slant) to the correct train platform. Then we had to figure out which car we were in - Steve had bought the tickets several weeks ago (Rick Steves suggested that as it sells out early) and we have assigned seats. We are in Car 8 in seats 4c and 4d.

We have passed many orchards - guessing they be olive orchards since Spain has many of them. It has been rather flat though now there are hills on both sides. The train takes 3.5 hours from Madrid to Granada. Went up to just over 200 km/h 140 mph

Well, we are now in Pension Landazuri in Granada ! 7:00 p.m.

We saw so many orchards, some fields which had red flowers (poppies?), mountains, few towns. There were 3 stops along the way.

We walked, pulling our suitcases, the 1.25 miles from the train station, up stone streets (like flat cobblestones) to this pension. Our arms are

tired, we are tired, those stone streets were horrible to pull the suitcases along. At least only one street (the last one) was uphill! It seemed like it was further than 1.25 miles! Oh, well, we are here!

We are going to rest a bit before getting some supper and going to our night tour at Alhambra at 10 p.m. I probably won't report on that until tomorrow - it took me about 4 hours yesterday to do my e-mail and the photos.

9 p.m.

Can you hear the cheers?? They are running a marathon on the street right under our balcony! When we went down the street to the square to find something to eat, I noticed the people lined up at the corner, looking like they were waiting for a parade. Well, it's a marathon and hundreds of men and women are running up our street (and it is fairly steep).

We went in a restaurant (?) that had long tables with benches, no regular seating. We talked with a woman from Sacramento who recommended the fried asparagus (almost everything is fried there) so we ordered that. With a glass of wine you also got fried anchovies - neither of us like anchovies, but they weren't bad. We also talked with a couple from Australia. When someone speaks English, we ask where they are from.

Our rooms have both had narrow balconies - this one is about a foot wide. There are no screens here, no bugs, so we open the glass balcony door and leave it open to cool the room (no air conditioning either!). The room in Madrid had a "balcony" (about 4" wide) into the courtyard, so we didn't get street noise. But I'm afraid this will be a noisy street tonight!

11:17 p.m.

We're back from our long (5 min. The innkeeper said, it took us more like 10) STEEP walk up to Alhambra and back down. We saw some of the marathoners running up there - they took the road, we took the path. They must have been exhausted! More tomorrow!

Good night! Sleep well!

God bless you.

Lynne and Steve



Wall and ceiling



Reflecting pool - bats were flying in the bottom section



A door with 6 windows



A doorway



So delicate!



Lion's courtyard



So intricate!



Obviously from the Christian Era since the Moors did not have pictures of people



Different textures



A dropped ceiling, partially restored

We climbed the steep hill to Alhambra. We waited for them to check tickets and passports. Then we wandered through the sections which were open at night, not open during the day. The architecture is very interesting, lots of different motifs.



The Generalife, North Pavilion of the palace



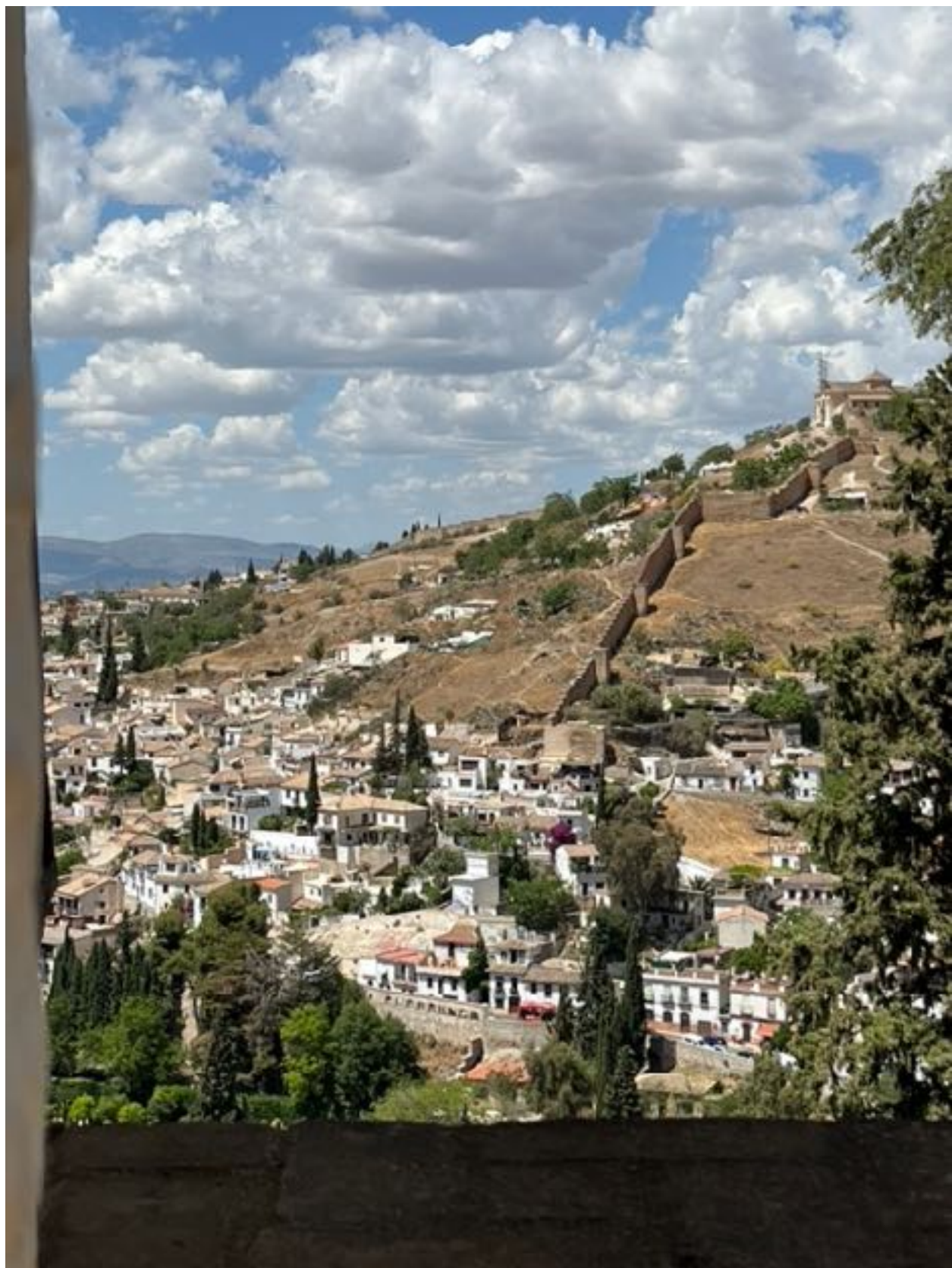
See the roses in the walkway by the courtyard in Generalife



Granada from the Generalife



Another fountain and garden, Generalife



See the old wall of Granada?



The water steps



Palace of Charles V. It has a large circular courtyard inside



The church inside the Alhambra - we could not go in



Buildings beside the church, tile roofs



Flowers against the wall. Also saw white ones like these.



View from front terrace of Pension Landazuri of Alhambra



View towards the Cathedral from our front terrace



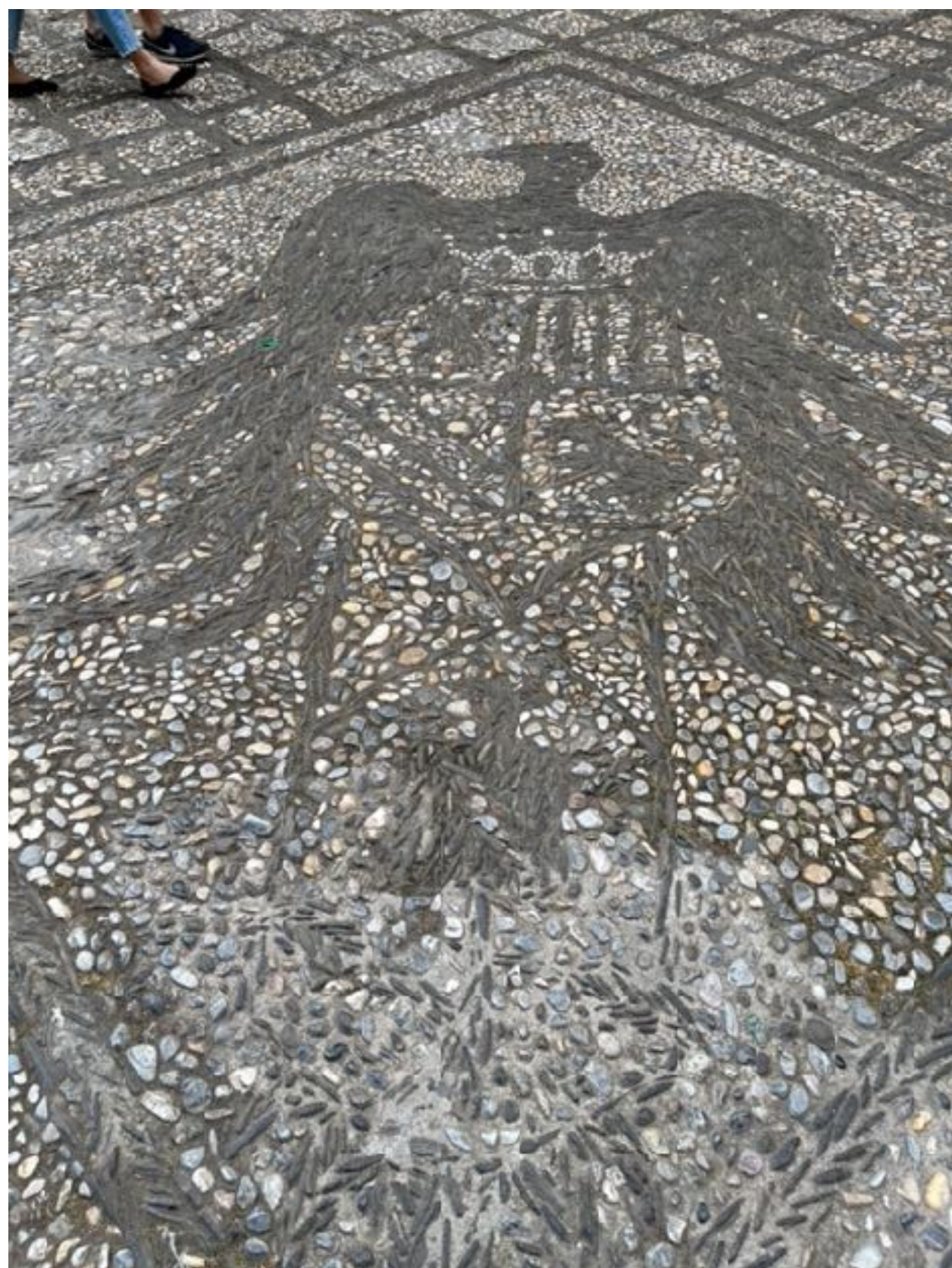
One side of front terrace



Back terrace of our hotel



Our hotel, Pension Landazuri - our room is the closest green window along the row of 5 windows/balconies. Notice the wall on the right - it is made of Roman bricks which are long and narrow.



Sometimes the stone walkways are made into designs - this one is near the Royal Chapel



The Corral del Carbon

May 7

Hello!

This morning we again slept late. We went to the “hole in the wall bar” next door - eggs and sausage and toast plus I had fresh squeezed orange juice and he had coffee and sugarcane juice (they ground it before serving it, 10 euros total! Inexpensive and freshly made.

We walked a few blocks, trying to find the entrance to the cathedral, finally arrived just before the gospel reading. Of course it was all in Spanish, so we didn’t understand it, but we were worshipping God in a

beautiful place. Charles V was the driving force behind the construction. It was built from 1523 to 1704, so is mostly Renaissance art but is also a mixture of Gothic, Baroque, and Neoclassicism also, and is 6 stories high. It has 2 gorgeous organs from the 18th century.

We then went to the Royal Chapel which was built under the orders of the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile (yes, they sent Columbus in search of America). When they took Granada from the Muslims on Jan. 2, 1492, they completed the Reconquest process and wanted to demonstrate the victory of Christianity over Islam, so they made Granada grand and chose to be buried there. They were also the architects of the unity of the kingdoms of Spain to make one country. We saw the ornate royal tombs, though Ferdinand and Isabella are buried in plain lead coffins in the crypt underneath. The altar is dedicated to John the Baptist and John the Evangelist. The sacristy includes personal objects belonging to the monarchs, including some of the 200 paintings she collected.

We came back to the hotel and rested for a while. Then we climbed up to Alhambra, taking the long road which isn't quite as steep. We entered through the main gate at the other end from where we entered last night. We walked past many gardens, often with a fountain, mostly beautiful roses, some other flowers. We went first to the Generalife Palace, the summer palace of the sultan, which was outside the Alhambra wall, but is now inside the Alhambra ticket. He provided fresh fruit and vegetables to the 1000 residents of the Alhambra.

We continued walking past and through beautiful rose gardens. We found a small shop which sold popsicles. There was a small courtyard beside it where we sat and enjoyed them.

Last night we had gone in the Palace of Charles V (a square building with a large circular courtyard inside). The first place we went last night was the Palacios Nazaries, including the royal offices, ceremonial rooms, and private quarters. It was built mostly in the 14th

century with rooms decorated from top to bottom with wood ceilings, stucco stalactites, ceramic tiles, molded-plaster walls, and filigree windows. This was actually 3 palaces, the Mexuar (used as an area for audiences with the public and the administration of justice), the Comares Palace (the king's official residence), and Palace of the Lions (the harem, the royal family's private dwelling place). All 3 had gardens and courtyards. The Courtyard of the Myrtles (reflecting pool in Photos #1 sent earlier) was in the Comares Palace. The Courtyard of the Lions (12 marble ones with water flowing to the fountain from 4 directions) was in the Palace of the Lions.

We decided we were tired and had seen the palaces in the previous paragraph last night, so we left by the Justice Gate (we used that last night also) and walked down the steep path to the Gate of Pomegranates which is at the end of the street the hotel is on.

9:30 p.m.

After resting, we went up 3 floors to the terrace at the top of our hotel. It's really nice! We could see Alhambra in one direction and the top of the cathedral in the other direction. We walked down one floor to the back terrace - there are many, many plants on it, the buildings behind are about 5 floors above here! Glad our hotel isn't up there!

We then walked down to the Main Street and found a restaurant. We sat next to the open window so could people watch (the Paseo in Spain) as we ate. First the waiter brought a heavy paper with 2 slices of bread, 4 cubes of ham, and 4 slices of a white sausage. We had juicy baby lamb and fries - it seems like everywhere you go, they serve fries! We also had slices of bread. All was delicious.

Then we walked, found the Alcaiceria (originally an Arab souk (bazaar) and silk market) with numerous souvenir shops. I bought 2 magnets, a commemorative spoon (I collect both), and a white skirt with purple flowers on it. We walked further, found the Corral del Carbon (a protected place for merchants to rest their animals, spend the night,

get a bite to eat, and spin yarns - it is not open. Then Steve needed ice cream to give him energy to walk back up the hill to our hotel. Today we walked 6.1 miles, yesterday it was only 4.3 miles, much of it up and down hills both days.

It was 80, beautiful blue sky, sunny.

Hope your day was good.

God bless you.

Lynne and Steve



The man at the “bar” stripping the juice from the sugar cane to make Steve’s breakfast drink - those are sugar cane in the basket underneath.



Inside the Corral del Carbon



Can you see the snow on the Sierra Nevada mountain just about in the center of the photo? Taken from the Autobahn in Granada



Castle on a hill on way to Ronda



Road shot for my brother-in-law Wayne

May 8

Greetings from Hotel San Francisco in Rondo!

We ate breakfast at the bar (it's only open 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. so not really a "bar") again, had the same breakfast as yesterday. We packed, left our suitcases at the hotel.

Steve wanted to go in the Corral del Carbon, so we started walking that way. I said it was one block ahead, he insisted that it was to the right and a few blocks - after walking about 6 blocks out of the way, we

ended up there, right where I said it was, a block from where he went off to the right.

We then walked to the train station, Hertz was in the station but gps said it was on the street, so we finally found it. Steve had tried for hours yesterday to figure out a train from Granada to Ronda, the early and late trains would work, the ones in the middle of the day were almost 3 times more expensive, so he decided to rent a car. It took us about 30 minutes to walk to the train station. We have a Golf.

Then we tried to go back to our hotel. Our gps sent us along the Autobahn (super highway), then up the mountain to Alhambra but there is no way you can access the hotel road that way - the city tour bus is the only vehicle allowed down the mountain to our road (we could walk it, but no other vehicle traffic). So we drove for an hour, trying to get to the hotel street - the Main Street it is off only allows buses and taxis in the 2 block section leading to that street. He finally drove illegally for 2 blocks so we could get to the hotel to pick up our luggage. It was really FRUSTRATING! The hotel turned in a paper that allowed us to drive illegally hopefully.

It took a while to figure out the air-conditioning, but finally got that and the car gps to work. Then we had an easy way, following gps to Rondo. We found our hotel but there's no parking. Steve took his suitcase and laptop bag in while I waited in the car. The man at the desk said it's free parking on the street if you can find a place. After driving in circles for a while, we found a place to park on the street. Then he dragged my suitcase and bag as we walked back to the hotel.

Then we couldn't find our room - it's on the first floor (same number as last night - 107) but 104 - 107 are half a story down from the first floor. The man showed us where it is - we are on an inner courtyard with a painting of Francis of Assisi on the tile wall opposite our window. The bathroom has bright royal blue and white tiles. We rested a few minutes.

Ronda is one of the largest white hill towns (most of the buildings are white). It's also one of the most spectacular, thanks to its gorge-straddling setting. (It was on the Grand Tour of Europe.) During Moorish times, this was a tight fortified town of 9,000 until it fell to Christian forces in 1485, seven years before Granada. Its main attractions are its gorge-spanning bridge, the oldest bullring in Spain, and an intriguing Old Town. (From Rick Steves)

We walked down the street, along a plaza with a fountain, then toward the bullring (no, we are not going in, though we passed it twice), and on to the bridge. The ravine called El Tajo is over 300' deep and about 200' wide. We walked across the New Bridge, built from 1751 to 1793, looking far down. We found several places to view the bridge, could also see the Arab Bridge (Old Bridge). That side is the Old Town. We're staying in the New Town.

We went looking for a restaurant serving tapas, but it was closed. We found Toro Tapas (Bull Tapas) and decided to eat there. We ordered a pitcher of Sangria, gazpacho, eggplant with sugar cane syrup, Iberian sausage with wine sauce, and Spanish oxtail, all tapas to share. All was very good. Then we walked back across the bridge a block, decided we were tired to go on, so turned back to the hotel. We were going to get a gelato on the way back, but didn't see any, so asked the man at the hotel and he sent us a block away. I had walnuts and cream, he had cherry and cream - it gave us enough energy to return to the hotel. So we're in for the night, early by Spanish life, but we're tired. Only walked 5.6 miles today.

When we hear someone talking in English we ask where they are from - today the couple sitting next to us at Toro Tapas is from Sweden. We've also had conversations with people from Scotland, Ireland, Slovakia, and Australia, plus California.

It was sunny, about 82.

Sleep well! Stay healthy!

God bless you.
Lynne and Steve



New Bridge over gorge in Ronda - 300' deep, 200' across, built 1751-1793



Looking southwest from the New Bridge



Old Bridge in Ronda



Looking northeast from the New Bridge



Sangria, bread, Iberian sausage in wine sauce, gazpacho at Toro Tapas



Spanish oxtail, eggplant with sugar cane syrup

May 9

Greetings from Hotel Califa! 3 p.m.

We packed our bags in Ronda, left them at the front desk, and walked to the car - it seemed closer than when we walked from the car to the hotel yesterday! We eventually found the hotel - so many one way streets, it's hard to get anywhere but Steve guessed right as to which street to take to our hotel. We picked up our bags and put them in the car.

We drove over the New Bridge, through the Moorish Quarter and followed the gps towards Cordoba. We saw beautiful scenery on the way, mountains, hills, plains (the rain in Spain was not on the plains today!), pretty flowers, planted fields and bare fields (saw a farm vehicle picking up the cut hay in one field). We are surprised that we see almost no farm animals - even when there are signs for cows (and we can smell them), we could not see any. I have seen 4 horses (2 in one field yesterday, 2 in a different field the previous day) and 1 goat today.

We found the hotel, had to go around many sharp corners through very narrow streets to get to park near it. Steve registered and took the suitcases to our room. Then we drove to the train station to return the car. We drove around the train station twice, trying to figure out where to return the car. He finally turned into a parking lot and found the Hertz sign. We walked across the street to return the keys, but the car rentals are closed from 1:30 until 4! It was 2:05.

We walked back towards the hotel, stopping at a bakery to get a pastry - it was shaped like a scallop shell with cream inside, very good. So now we're relaxing in our room, but we aren't opening our window - it's about 95 outside!

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9 p.m.

The sun still has not set, but we're back in our room for the night.

Around 5 we walked to the train station and paid for the car. We came back and rested a bit. Around 7 we headed out again,, walked along the old city wall and then in through a gate. We wandered along the old streets, ended up at the Mezquita. It was a former massive mosque with a 16th century Christian church in the center. The courtyard was open, but the rest was closed. We wandered further down the road and found El Rinconcilla which had tables in the small square. They were shaded so we decided to eat there. We ordered an Iberic charcuterie which was 4 kinds of thinly sliced meat (we were expecting some cheese on it also) and sirloin steak in wine sauce which also had slices of fried potato on it. It was good.

Then we wandered down to the river - it's at least a foot low and barely flowing under the Roman Bridge. Back inside the city wall we found the Jewish synagogue and

looked around inside. With many stops on benches for rest, we headed back to the hotel. We sat on the edge of a pool with fountains next to the city wall. Swallows were circling over us, some landing on niches in the wall. Steve was surprised how tiny the black swallows were. It's now 85, but still feels hot!

Hope your day was good.

God bless you.
Lynne and Steve



View along road from Ronda to Cordoba



Road shot



Interesting countryside



Pretty tree



Bushes along median and side of Autobahn - pink, red, white



Cordoba city wall and gate we went in



Mequita Bell Tower



Church in Mezquita



Iberico charcuterie



Sirloin steak in wine sauce with fried potatoes



Girl walking by



outside wall of Mezquita



Inside Jewish synagogue



Womens balcony in synagogue

Cordoba 5/10b

Hi!

This morning we woke at 8:41 and were out of here in a half hour. We rushed over to Mezquita - if you go to the 9:30 Mass, you get in for free. We made it with a few minutes to spare, even though we had to backtrack a block. We entered the courtyard where the Muslim faithful would gather to perform ablution, ritual washing before prayer, as directed by Muslim law. Orange trees grow here - they are not good oranges to eat. The service was held in the Choir. There were about

70 present, including 6 priests. Our backs were to the main altar. Then we wandered around inside.

The Mezquita was the Visigoth Basilica of San Vicente in the mid-sixth century. With the arrival of the Muslims the area was divided and used by both communities. With the conquest of Cordoba in 1236 it was consecrated as a Catholic Church. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Mezquita was once the center of Western Islam and the heart of a cultural capital that rivaled Baghdad and Constantinople. The Mezquita is immense, 600' by 400'. The remains of the old minaret are integrated into the bell tower.

Inside are over 800 blue columns topped with red and white double arches, a round Romanesque arch above a Visigothic horseshoe arch. The Treasury held many beautiful religious artifacts and the enormous monstrance that is paraded through the streets of Cordoba each Corpus Christi, 60 days after Easter. There are many chapels to see. We could see through the floor into the basement where the Visigoth church had been.

Unlike other Muslim mosques, the Mihrab points to the south. The imam (prayer leader) would stand here to read scripture and give sermons. He spoke loudly into the niche, his back to the assembled crowd (maybe 20,000 kneeling on the floor) and the architecture worked to amplify his voice so all could hear.

We wandered in the Jewish Quarter, found a small store where we bought empanadas - he had an Iberian chicken, mine had walnuts, apples, raisins, and cinnamon. We sat on the steps against the Mezquita to eat. Then we wandered further in the Jewish Quarter, stepped in the Artisan Market where we saw a few artists at work. A local tour guide saw that Steve was carrying the Rick Steves Spain book - he said his father wrote part of it. He also said that Rick Steves was in Cordoba last week - so we missed him! We use his books for our European travels. We saw the statue of Maimonides, one of the

greatest Jewish scholars in the last 2000 years. We came back to the hotel to rest.

5:30 p.m.

We went out for dinner at 3:15 - many restaurants close from 4 - 8 p.m. I can't eat that late. So to go to the restaurant we wanted, we had to go early. We went to Taberna Restaurant Casa Rubio, a nice, fancy one. The servers wore white long-sleeved blouses and black skirts or pants and had bright red lipstick on. We had a Roman salad with octopus and paprika (it had a potato salad base) and Sephardic lamb with honey, all good. They also put a bowl of bread on the table (which we didn't order) but they charge for it.

Then we wandered through the area, looking for souvenirs - I wanted a magnet which was a blue flowerpot with flowers in it and a fan, finally found them. We looked for shady streets to walk along as we wandered back to our hotel. An ambulance was driving along the one narrow street we were walking along - it barely fit between the buildings, these are really narrow streets! If you stand against a building, there is barely room for the ambulance/car to pass you. We're tired and hot - it's 93.

10:00 p.m.

I'm exhausted - walked more than 7.3 miles today! We went out for a gelato about 8:00 and just got back. We walked along the City Wall, then across the Roman Bridge, along the road to the next modern bridge (built in 2003, I think it said), back across the Guadalquivir River, then headed up, ended up at the back of Mezquita. We finally found a gelato store that was still open (many were closed or closing as we passed them). The sky had pink clouds in it as the sun set. We could see Venus. Then we took a wrong turn, ended up about 2 stories below street level - which was a very busy place, many in line to get into venues (bars?). Finally I asked Steve to check his gps and find the way back, we were headed the wrong way, at least it was only

about a block back to where we could walk up to our street level and finally back here.

Hope you had a good day!

God bless you.

Lynne and Steve



The bell tower of the Mezquita - the remains of a minaret are integrated in the tower.



The Roman bridge - now silted in, once ships could sail here



Altar in Mezquita



Minrab - the Imam faced inside and his voice could be heard by all the 20,000 Muslims worshipping here on their knees



Monstrance, maybe 9' tall, carried around Cordoba on Corpus Christi Day, 60 days after Easter



Any idea what this machine was used for? It was on display in the Mezquita



Blue columns topped with red and white double arches a round Romanesque arch above a Visigothic horseshoe arch



Seats in the Choir were carved with different scenes



Looking down through the floor into the original Visigoth Basilica of San Vicente (mid-sixth century)



Moses Maimonides, the “Jewish Aquinas”, 1135-1204



Flower Street



Roman Bridge with Cordoba behind



Going down 2 stories when we should have stayed up!



For some reason I omitted photos of yesterday's dinner - Russian salad with octopus, a potato salad base



Succulent lamb. Wow, do I look tired! I can't keep my eyes open for photos!



Roman mausoleum for a wealthy Roman



Flowering bush seen along the roadside



Road shot



Another road shot - I thought the clouds were interesting

Cordoba to Caceres 5/11c

Greetings from Hotel Iberia!

I am sitting on a divan in a pretty room (like a drawing room) - We walked barefoot down the hall our room to relax here, but I fear it's not going to be relaxing. There is a music (NOISE we would call it!) festival in the Plaza cattycorner from the hotel. It's supposed to go from 8 - 11:30 but I fear it will go much later than that - it started at least an hour early. And we're on the quiet side of the hotel, as far as possible from it.

This morning we packed up, checked out of the hotel, walked to the train station where we picked up a Fiat 500. It's tiny! We had quite a time trying to figure out how to start it (had to shake the steering wheel), how to work the windows (controls are on the center console), and how to back up (there's a ring you pull up to get in reverse so you don't accidentally go into reverse when you want to go into 6th). So glad we grew up driving standard shift cars! The Fiat has no power!

We drove through the countryside, the land of Don Quioto. It was pretty - mountains, some fields newly harvested, some growing, lots of olive orchards. For a change we actually saw farm animals in the fields - cows, horses, pigs, goats, sheep. You see signs warning of deer as you drive - there were signs with a cow on them - but only once did we actually see cows in a pasture by the sign. We also saw 2 signs with a cat on them - maybe a lynx?

We stopped at a roadside restaurant for lunch around 3 p.m. The menu was only in Spanish and the waiter only spoke Spanish, so we had to guess at what to order. We ordered gazpacho de ajo - it had small bits of ham and cheese in it. We also ordered largarte iberico - which is grilled steak chunks and French fries. For dessert we again guessed - Tartu de queze - had cheesecake with raspberry sauce on the plate.

We passed a tomato (I'm guessing it's a water tower) with two storks on a nest on top. I also saw 2 storks on a nest on top of an adobe house. Caceres is supposed to be a place for storks to nest. Never heard of Caceres? Me, either! But we're here.

There is no way to get a vehicle to this hotel, it's all pedestrian walkways around it. So we parked in a parking garage, pulled our suitcases down a ramp about 3 flights long, checked in, left our suitcases in our room. We then drove about 25 minutes to the bus station to leave the car. We walked a block up hill (yes, this town also is very hilly) to the train station and bought our tickets for tomorrow - on the train to Madrid we ride in separate cars, we got the last 2

tickets! We then walked the mile (about 30 minutes) back to the hotel. It's much shorter to walk than to drive around town!

We then went to the Tourist Information to find out about the Roman ruins. But there wasn't as much as Steve thought. We went to Torre de Bujaco which was a tower from maybe the 14th century. We climbed the narrow staircase (glad we weren't any bigger!) so we could see the town of Caceres. Then we walked further along the top of the wall (it was a walled city though only a small portion of the wall is still there) and over the wall of a former palace to see Roman ruins under shelter.

Caceres has been a trade route city and a political center of the local nobles for many centuries. Since prehistoric times, people from different cultures have gathered in Caceres and have shaped its strong historical roots. Pre-Roman settlements occupied the original plot, followed by the Roman, Arab, Jewish, and Christian people.

We came back to the hotel with a stop to pick up a beer for Steve and a gelato for me. At the moment there is a break in the noise outside - it's pleasantly quiet now! It was 80 and sunny today. We walked over 4.3 miles.

Sleep well! Stay healthy!

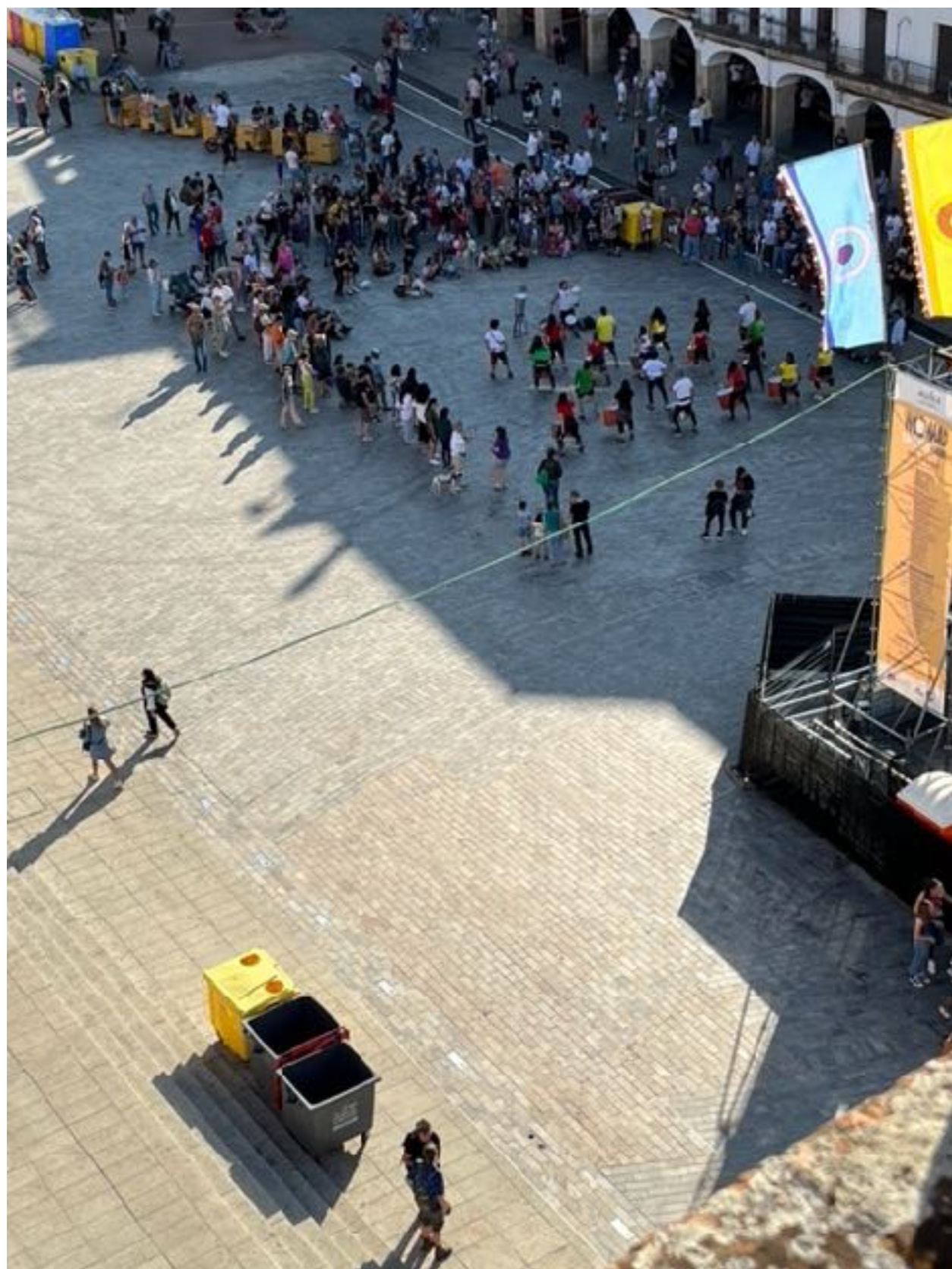
God bless you.
Lynne and Steve



largarte iberico



On top of Torre de Bujaco in Cáceres



Drumming group in plaza below



The plaza - the Hotel Iberia is the one with writing on it



View east from the tower



Roman ruins



Here I am, writing to you as I eat my ice cream cone!



Arco-Torre del Christo

Verracos

Los verracos son esculturas zoomorfas realizadas en granito que representan a cerdos, jabalíes o toros. Su significado se ha relacionado con la protección de los ganados y su importancia como recurso económico de la comunidad, así como marcadores de pastos y territorios.

Son una de las expresiones más significativas de la Segunda Edad del Hierro. La distribución de más de cuatrocientos ejemplares se vincula con el territorio ocupado por los vetones en las provincias de Ávila, Salamanca, Zamora, Toledo y Cáceres. El Museo de Cáceres cuenta con ejemplares de Bujía, Cáceres, Casas del Monte, Madrigal y Segura de Toro.



Un grupo de verracos en el Museo de Cáceres. Fotografía: M. Martínez.

Verracos are zoomorphic sculptures made of granite representing pigs, wildboars or stags. Its meaning has been related to the protection of animals, as well as pasture and territory markers.



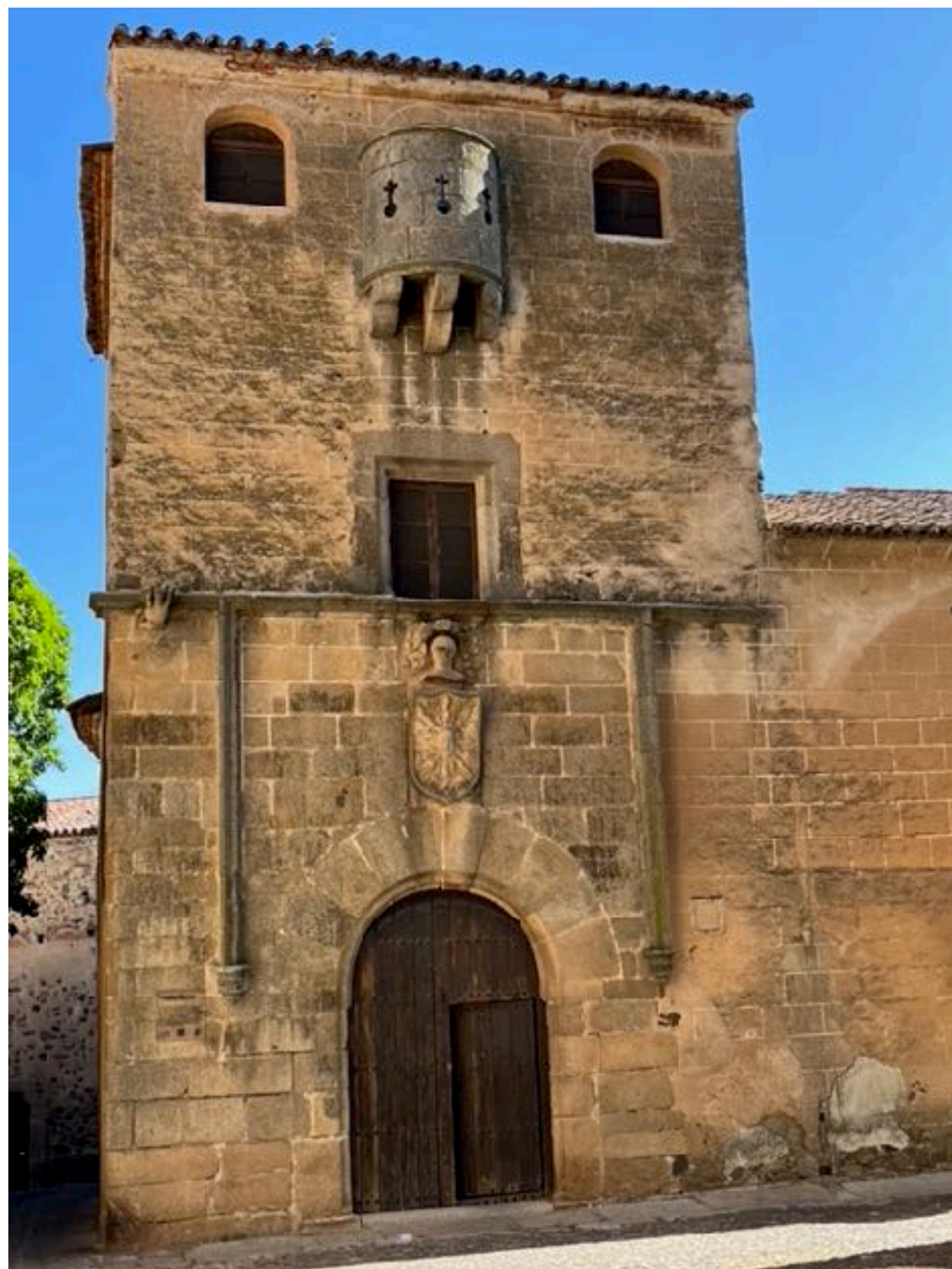
In museum: pig to mark edge of field or protection of animals



View out museum window in Caceres



Earthen vessel for liquids



Building in old town Caceres

Caceres to Toledo via Madrid 5/12d

Greetings from the regional train! 2 p.m.

We're going through very arid land, there were many cattle at first, now it's just desert countryside.

It was noisy last night but finally the noise stopped. At 2 a.m.. I guess the couple in the next room came back - it sounded like she was talking in our room loudly.

I slept until 7:40, the earliest I've woken up. We packed, left our suitcases at the hotel, and headed back into Old Town, up and down stone streets until we reached the Arco-Torre del Christo (gate in the old wall). It was 56 degrees! Then we climbed back up to the Museo (museum). Of course the signs were all in Spanish with occasionally a short sentence in English. There were prehistoric tools, funeral stones, modern art, a cistern (we didn't go down to it, the steps were really narrow and there was little light). -We're in a very long tunnel at the moment. - Then we wandered farther through the area and back to Plaza Mayor. We eventually found a restaurant and each had a Spanish omelet (layers of potatoes with egg in between). A group of students came through the plaza, using empty plastic buckets as drums and did some drumming.

We went back to the hotel, waited and waited for the hotelier to come. I finally yelled, "Hola" and in showed up to unlock our luggage. He said there was a taxi stand just on the next street. We dragged our suitcases, went up the hill, kept walking, couldn't find a taxi. We asked twice, but still didn't find a taxi. We were walking toward the train station, finally Steve caught a taxi and he had us at the station in

5 minutes - it would have taken us at least 20 more minutes - it was worth the 6 euros!

Then we waited and waited, no train. It was about 10 minutes late, hope we will make our connecting train! Steve is supposed to be in the car behind me, but I'm sitting at a table and there were many empty seats, so he has moved next to me until someone claims the seat.

Greetings from Hotel Santa Isabel, Toledo! 9:00 p.m.

Yes, we made it, but it was a close thing!

No one claimed the seat Steve was using, so he sat with me almost the whole way. A lady from Scotland, who also lived in Brussels and Spain sat across the table from us, and we chatted the rest of the way. We arrived on time in Madrid, then had to wait over an hour for the train to Toledo (pronounced with the e as a long a). We got a sandwich to eat.

We waited and waited for them to post the track number and they didn't. Steve finally asked, they said we could go in, so he went flying in, sent his suitcase through the security machine and disappeared. I searched and searched, couldn't find my ticket. I called him, he didn't answer. Finally he called me - he had my ticket. He got someone who worked there to bring me my ticket, so I finally got in. Then I forgot to put my purse through the security machine, so had to go back. Steve had disappeared again. Finally I heard him call my name. Of course, our train was on the furthestest track and another train was behind it, so I guess the train had to wait for us to get on. I was rather upset. He chatted with a couple from California on the train.

We got to Toledo - they have a beautiful old train station. Steve got our tickets back to Madrid for Sunday. Glad we decided to take a taxi. It was up long hills. It was worth the 7.15 euros, even if it was only a

mile. We waited for the hotelier to show up. We chatted with a couple from Victoria, British Columbia.

We're in 301, no longer on the first floor! Our window view is of the cathedral and Alcazar. A bottle of wine and some candy are included in the cost of this hotel (had to borrow a corkscrew though). We walked down the hill, up the hill, past the cathedral to find a gelato shop. I had a cone, he had a crepe.

Despite 2 taxi rides and 2 train rides, we still walked 4.5 miles. It was about 72 degrees in Caceres at noon, it's 61 here.

Hope your day was good.

God bless you.
Lynne and Steve

P.S. no photos tonight

Toledo 5/13c

Greetings!

We weren't asleep yet when the siren went off about 12:30 and continued for at least 15 minutes - it was horribly loud and obnoxious. Then it stopped for a few seconds, continued, stopped, continued for another 15 minutes. Then it was quiet for about a half hour, then went off for a few seconds twice. The hotelier said someone was playing a joke and pushing the doorbell. Sleep was nonexistent! I slept very poorly, maybe 2.5 hours total. So I'm tired!

We ate the hotel breakfast - yogurt with cereal and raspberry syrup at the bottom, a large croissant, fruit (an apple, banana, and kiwi fruit.

Then we headed to the cathedral and toured it - with admission you got earphones and a multimedia guide. For more than 1000 years, the people of Toledo have worshipped on this spot. The first were Visigoth Christians in a small church. Around 711, Islamic Moors conquered the city, tore down that church, and built a magnificent mosque. When Toledo was reconquered in 1085, Christians started using the mosque for their own services. But in 1226, the now-crumbling structure was dismantled, and construction began on the current cathedral. Toledo's Gothic cathedral is still considered the spiritual heart of Spain. It is 200' wide and 400' long because it used the footprint of the mosque.

The High Altar is 80' tall and made of gold on wood. The altarpiece has scenes of the life of Christ. There are stone statues of bishops, saints, and one Muslim, who brokered the peaceful handover of the mosque to the Christians in 1085. The tomb of Cardinal Mendoza who helped Ferdinand and Isabella conquer the Moors in Granada, promoted Columbus, and oversaw the completion of the cathedral (it took 250 years to build!) is near the altar. The Choir contains 120 carved wood stalls and also the statue of the Virgin and Child.

The Chapter House has portraits of the archbishops of the last 1,900 years. The Transparente has a large altar. In the Sacristy is the painting of El Greco's The Spoliation, Christ's Being Stripped of his Garments, and other paintings. We saw the 10 foot tall gold Monstrance which is carried around Toledo on Corpus Christi Day. There were many side chapels and a cloister.

Then we walked to Alcazar, a mighty fortress. Unfortunately the museum is closed, so we could only see some of the ruins of the area around the Alcazar. We then walked around the outside of the cathedral (took a wrong turn so walked further), heading for a restaurant recommended to us. But you needed a reservation to get in, so we walked further, finding Restaurant Placido, which had space for us. We had Andalusian gazpacho and 1/2 peasant stewed Toledo style accompanied by red cabbage and baby potato in fine herbs. We

also got 2 large rolls - they serve bread plain, no olive oil, no butter, no jelly at every place we've been. All was delicious. The people at the next table were on a 14 day Rick Steves tour of Spain, so we chatted with them for a few minutes.

From there we headed to the El Greco Museum, which was free today. A man built a house, similar to the one El Greco lived in in Toledo, and placed objects and paintings done by him and by other painters. There were slide shows about how El Greco painted, and also photographs of some of his work and where it is now (in what museum/church in the world).

We walked a bit further, could see the Tajo River. At that point I was too tired to go on, so we chose a route with moderate hills back to the hotel. So far we have walked 4.4 miles, over 10,000 steps. It was chilly this morning (I took my jacket), now is 71.

We have seen very few Negroes and Moors few - no south Asians. There are many Orientals and many children. Many real cameras!

Have a good Lord's Day.

God bless you.
Lynne and Steve



View from our hotel window - Santa Iglesia Cathedral and Alcazar



“The giant” - St. Christopher - in the cathedral



Above the high altar



Transparente altar in Apse



El Greco's The Spoliation (Christ Being Stripped of His Garments)



Copy of Bible of Saint Louis, the 13th century king of France



700 year old statue of Virgin and Child in the Choir



Monstrance - 10' tall above the angel altar, over 400 pounds



View from Alcazar



Alcazar



Moorish office building



Andalusian Gazpacho with red and green peppers



1/2 partridge stewed Toledo style accompanied by red cabbage and baby potatoes in fine herbs



Family walking down the street in fancy dresses



Tajo River - ruins of a bridge



San Martin Bridge and falls



I find the walls of the buildings interesting!



St. Theresa of Avila at Santa Cruz Museum, Toledo



Tower we had been at the top of



Spanish omelet



View from train Caceres to Madrid - wheat growing



Another view



View from our window in Madrid



Breakfast at Saint Isabel - also had vanilla yogurt with raspberry syrup on bottom, cereal on top, and toast with ham and tomatoes

Madrid 5/15c

Hello!

Last night we went to find the Coffee Corner - go down steps, up steps, down more steps to the lower basement - probably more than 3 flights of stairs. The hotel has free coffee, juice, fruit, cookies. We can go there 24 hours a day. This morning there was a breakfast bag on our doorknob - two 330 ml of water, 2 pastries, and some small cookies.

This morning, since we have nothing planned for today, Steve wanted to go to the archaeology museum. So we figured out how to use the subway system (how to get tickets - you use your ticket to get in and to get out), took a subway 3 stops, then figured out how to find the museum. We walked to it - and it is closed on Mondays! Should have read the book BEFORE we left! So we walked along the Gran Via Walk (supposed to be stores for the wealthy - we passed the Four Seasons Hotel - the hoteliers outside to greet the clients had 3 piece suits with tails!) until I suddenly recognized where we were - we had gone past the building with 2 chariots on top (one had 3 horses, the other 4) on the way to Prada last week. We came back to our hotel and rested.

We finally went out for lunch about 3 p.m. but it was chilly, so we came back for our jackets. We went back to Plaza Mayor where there will be a concert sometime today. It is Saint Isadore's Day, so, I guess, there's a day off for the people of Madrid. Earlier we had seen many small girls with fancy dresses, white with red dots or hearts, flounced at the knees. We ate at the first restaurant on the plaza. We had bread (this time olive oil and butter came with it!), marquis paella (paella with peeled seafood of prawns, squid, shrimp, mussels, sweet peppers and peas) and huge (white) asparagus with vinaigrette. Then we came back to the hotel to rest.

The layout of our floor of the hotel is a labyrinth - we go up 2 flights of steps, walk forward about 10 steps, turn right and go up 8 steps, turn left for 5 steps, turn right for 15 steps, turn left for 5 steps, turn right for 5 steps, go right for about 15 steps, around the corner to the right for 8 steps, then left 5 steps, then right for about 20 steps to our door. You have to use a passcode to open the door, no keys. Also, since this is an inside corridor, every time you turn a corner the light goes on - it's all dark in the halls until it senses movement and then the lights turn on - a couple of times the light turns on a few seconds after you enter the corridor (and that's really scary as you descend steps). In our room there's a door to an inner courtyard (maybe 6' x 12') which is

locked - sun came in our room for a few minutes this morning.
Hopefully that will keep the noise of the concert from bothering us.

7:30

We went to a Flamenco Show. They gave us each a drink (beer, wine, Sangria), then we went downstairs to the stage. We were sitting in the front row with a short runway right beside me. There was a lot of clapping, one guy sang, one on drum, one on guitar, 2 women and one man did the dancing. It was in a basement vault with a vaulted ceiling, about 35 watching. I didn't expect that a man would dance, I just thought women did the dancing. It was interesting. (Only one of my photos from the show came from my phone to my laptop so that's all I can send.)

We went down to the Coffee Corner for coffee for Steve. A woman from Toronto and her mother from Argentina came down also - they had hiked part of the pilgrim trail in north Spain before coming here.

Today was sunny, 70, with a breeze. We only walked 4.1 miles today.

Hope your day was good.

God bless you.

Lynne and Steve



marquis paella (paella with peeled seafood of prawns, squid, shrimp, mussels, sweet peppers and peas)



Flamenco







Inside a typical house long ago, note the loom in the center - at the National Archaeology Museum in Madrid



From the train







See the storks' nests on the bell tower? Note the stork on the nest on the left



Our room at Hotel Palacio de los Velada in Avila



Avila old city wall



Convent of St. Teresa of Avila



Above the Altar in St. Teresa church



Nuns in contemplative scene, looking at the altar above where St. Teresa was born



The altar they were looking at



St. Teresa



Mil gracias derramando,
pasó por estos sitios con presura,
y venecios mirando,
con sola su figura,
vestidos los dejó de su hermostrura.

San Juan de la Cruz

St. John of the Cross



Bacon and cheese Sandwich, muffin



Altar at Basilica of San Vicente



Tomb of 3 martyrs in Basilica of San Vicente



Salad, white asparagus, ham, French omelet, salad, veal cutlet, French fries

Avila to Salamanca 5/17c

Greetings from Hotel Emperatriz!

This morning we got up early, packed, took a taxi to the train station, and got on the train. It was 36 degrees! When the conductor came for our tickets, we discovered that Steve had bought bus tickets, not train tickets to get here. So we had to pay for train tickets then. Only 25 euros for both. After stopping at many small towns, we arrived in Salamanca. We took a taxi to near the hotel - it's on a pedestrian only area so we had to walk about 5 minutes to get here.

We rested for a while, then went out to find something to eat. We found a restaurant on the street - sat in the sun. I had bacon salad, goat cheese, and cherry tomatoes plus breaded beef filled with Iberian ham and cheese (and salad without dressing and French fries) and yogurt with strawberries plus wine. Steve had gnocchi with pomodera sauce and parmesan cheese, hake with green sauce, lams, and baby eels, rice pudding, and wine. Each meal was only 13.80 euros! Very good.

Then we started the Salamanca Walk (by Rick Steves) - we went to the Plaza Mayor, built from 1729-1788 by brothers Alberto and Nicolas Churriguera, is Spain's ultimate plaza. Bullfights were held here until 1893. The entire square is built from a lemony, local sandstone called piedra de Villamayor. When first quarried, this stone is easy to carve, but over time it hardens, ideal for delicate but durable architectural decoration. Here we saw the town hall with 5 flags flying, the purple province of Salamanca, the state of Castile-Leon (red-and-white checkerboard, with castles and lions), Spain (red and yellow), the city of Salamanca (red with coat of arms), and the EU flag (blue with circle of gold stars).

We walked the Calle Rea Mayor, Salamanca's main drag. We passed the Casa de las Conchas, its facade is encrusted with more than 300 scallop shells of St. James, honoring the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route that passes along here from Seville to Galicia. There are also scallop shells in the pavement. Across the street is the La Clerecia Church, nicknamed "the Stairway to Heaven", we didn't climb the 200 steps for grand views of the area. We passed the University of Salamanca.

We entered the Salamanca Cathedral, received audioguide to hear about the church. When constructing a spacious new cathedral (1513-1733), church fathers put it right next to the town's 12th century Romanesque old cathedral, they share buttresses. The interior is vast and majestic, rivaling any in Spain. The ceilings and dome have beautiful stonework. There are many side chapels. We thought the main altar was very plain. The Choir had beautiful carvings on the seat backs. There are 2 beautiful organs above the choir. Then you go into the old cathedral, see the cloisters, and more side chapels. In the Chapel of St. Barbara, the university students would sit for final exams with professors, around the tomb of a Salamanca bishop. We did not walk up in the bell tower.

We continued to the old Roman Bridge, walked half way across it - not much water goes under it today since there are dams just a few hundred feet upriver. Steve also walked around a building which appeared to be Roman, but it replaced an older church in the 1950s. We are now resting for a while - walking uphill is getting more challenging!

9 p.m.

We just returned from walking back to the Plaza Mayor. We checked some restaurants, the one we went to charged more to sit on the terrace (on the plaza) than inside (about 40 cents more per item). They had tapas, and we wanted to sit inside since the wind is still blowing and the sun is going down. I had an artichoke and coke. He had pigs' cheek and wine. The small bottle of coke (237 ml) cost 10

cents more than a glass of wine! We walked around the plaza and back to our room. As we came in, a couple with a red setter followed us in. Most dogs we see are well behaved. At least half are very small dogs (smaller than a dachshund). We only walked 3.7 miles today, but we're tired. It got up to 69, but now it's 60 degrees.

Sleep well! Stay healthy!

God bless you.
Lynne and Steve



San Estaban Church (St. Stephen)

Salamanca to Ponferrada 5/19c

Greetings from Hotel el Castillo!

Yes, the castle is just down the road from here!

This morning we packed, checked out, waited for a taxi (before 10 a.m. delivery trucks and taxis are allowed in the pedestrian zone in front of the hotel), took the taxi to the train station. We ate at the station cafe, then picked up our rental car. We had asked for a very small one, our SEAT (Spanish car) is larger than a Honda Civic, looks like a modern station wagon.

We drove out of town and headed northwest. So glad we have gps to tell us how to go where we want to go!!!! We passed through miles of areas where forest fires had been, maybe years ago, some trees were green at the top but burned lower down. When we went through tunnels in mountains, the road stayed 3 lanes wide.

We drove for more than 3 hours to Les Medulas. This is a World Heritage Roman site where the Romans washed away the mountain to get the gold in it from 50 B.C. to 200 A.D. We stopped at the Information which had a museum. But he was closing in 3 minutes, so gave us a map and we were off. We walked past several restaurants until we chose one. We sat on the terrace. We had appetizers (plate of 4 kinds of meat (2 kinds of sausage, dried beef, ham) and one kind of cheese) and soft boiled egg, sausage (shaped like a hot dog), ham, French fries).

Then we started walking toward the other Information center (closed until 3) and on to the trail to a cave which the Romans had carved in the mountainside. It was supposed to be mostly a flat trail but it had several inclines. There was a display at the cave (which we couldn't enter) about how the Romans dug vertical shafts to horizontal galleries. They had brought water to the top of the mountain and formed lakes there. Then they removed the dam on the lake and flooded the shafts. As the water seeped into the conglomerate rock, it collapsed the mountain. They did that to remove the overburden above the ore-bearing rock. The gold which was washed out of the mountain was mined as placer mining had been done. I read someplace that they had mined 5-6,000 kilos (more than 6 tons of gold).

We decided to go back the way we came rather than continue the path uphill quite a bit. There were chestnut trees along the way - some of the large trunks were hollow but leaves were abundant overhead. We each got a coke at the restaurant at the end of the trail. We walked back, stopping at both information areas, looking at the information in Spanish and the Spanish film about the mining.

We then took a side road, up the side of a mountain (12% grade) to a parking lot. Wow, was it a long way down! Then we walked 0.6 km up further (0.2 km straight up) to a viewpoint where we could see the parts of the mountain which were left (we were at 3034' high, valley was at 1700'). It was quite a view! The road down (fortunately paved rather than dirt and stones like the path to the cave) was an 11% grade. It was scary for me for Steve to drive down the mountain - they don't put in guard rails in most of Spain and the road was just over one lane wide with two-way traffic.

We continued driving to Ponferrada in northwest Spain, north of Portugal. Fortunately we found a parking space very close to the hotel so don't have to pay for parking.

We've seen storks flying. Most of the ones were standing on the nests, so guess there aren't any eggs or babies in them.

Surprisingly, it is much warmer in the mountains of northwest Spain than in Salamanca - close to 72 here!

9 p.m.

Shock! This is the first hotel since we left home that has a washcloth! In Europe they don't have washcloths! We've had 2 hotels which had bidets.

We walked down the street for me to take a photo of the castle. One tower is separated from the castle with a bridge from the castle to the tower. We stopped for ice cream, served in a sundae dish. I had passion fruit, he had nougat. Vanilla and chocolate were the only the other 2 flavors. We've seen the symbols for the Camino de Santiago in Las Medulas and here.

Hope your day was good.

God bless you.

Lynne and Steve



View from a roadside stop



Poppies in Las Médulas



Chestnut tree - the left side is full of leaves - how can it survive?



A diagram of how the Romans washed away the mountain to mine gold - in the center photo you see the shafts they have dug. In the last photo, water was allowed into the shafts and it collapsed the mountain to get the gold at the bottom of the mountain



What remains of the mountain after much of it was washed away

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reach the 100 meters of power, a
in front of which you are standing

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containing more gold. This is
have these exploitation front
each one of them correspond

The great space that we ca
exploited for tens of years
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Another diagram of making the mine shafts, sending the water into the shafts, the mountain collapses, part of the mountain is gone, the gold is collected

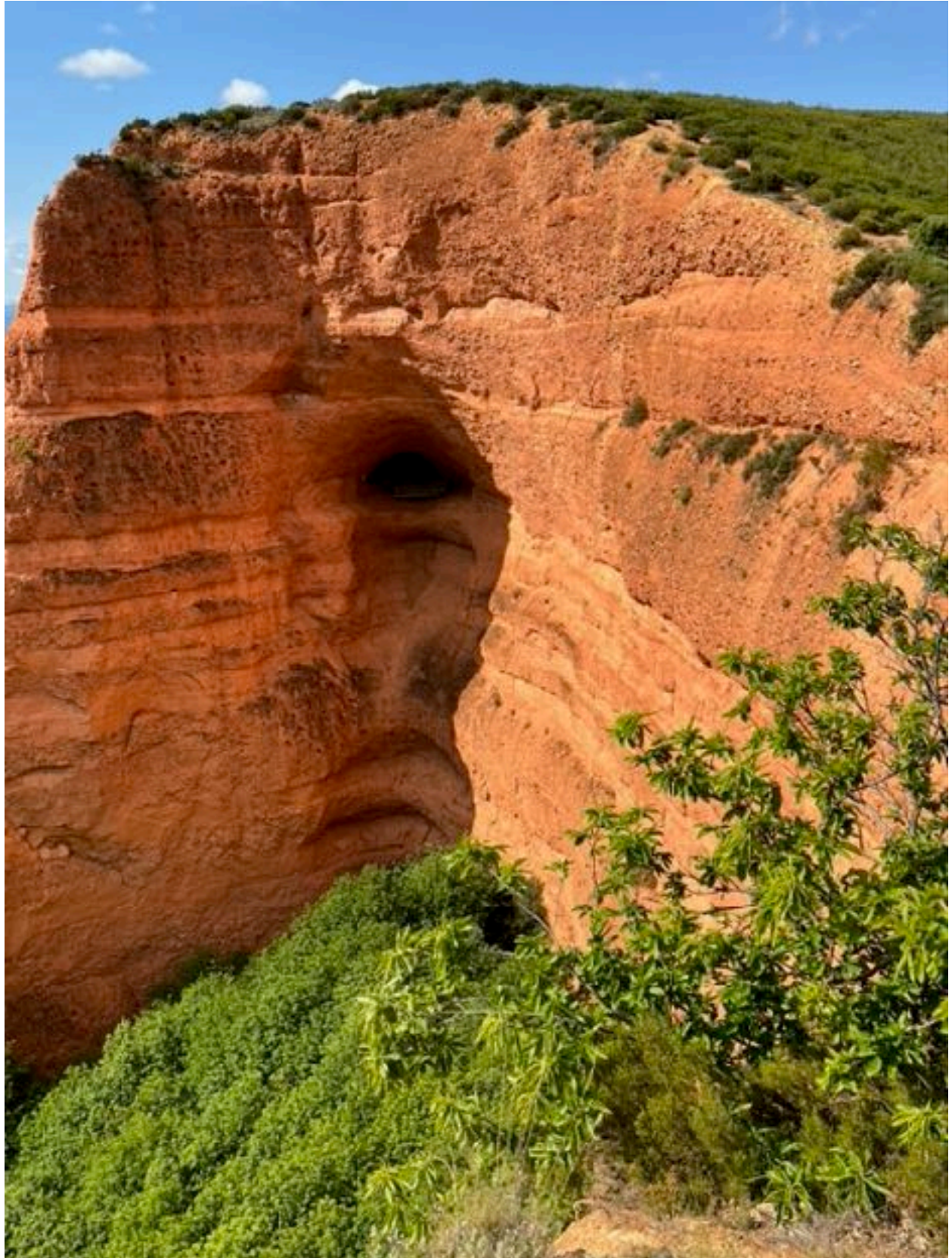




View of Ponferrada from where we parked our car - it's a scary mountain road down, no guard rails, a wide one lane road which has traffic going both ways



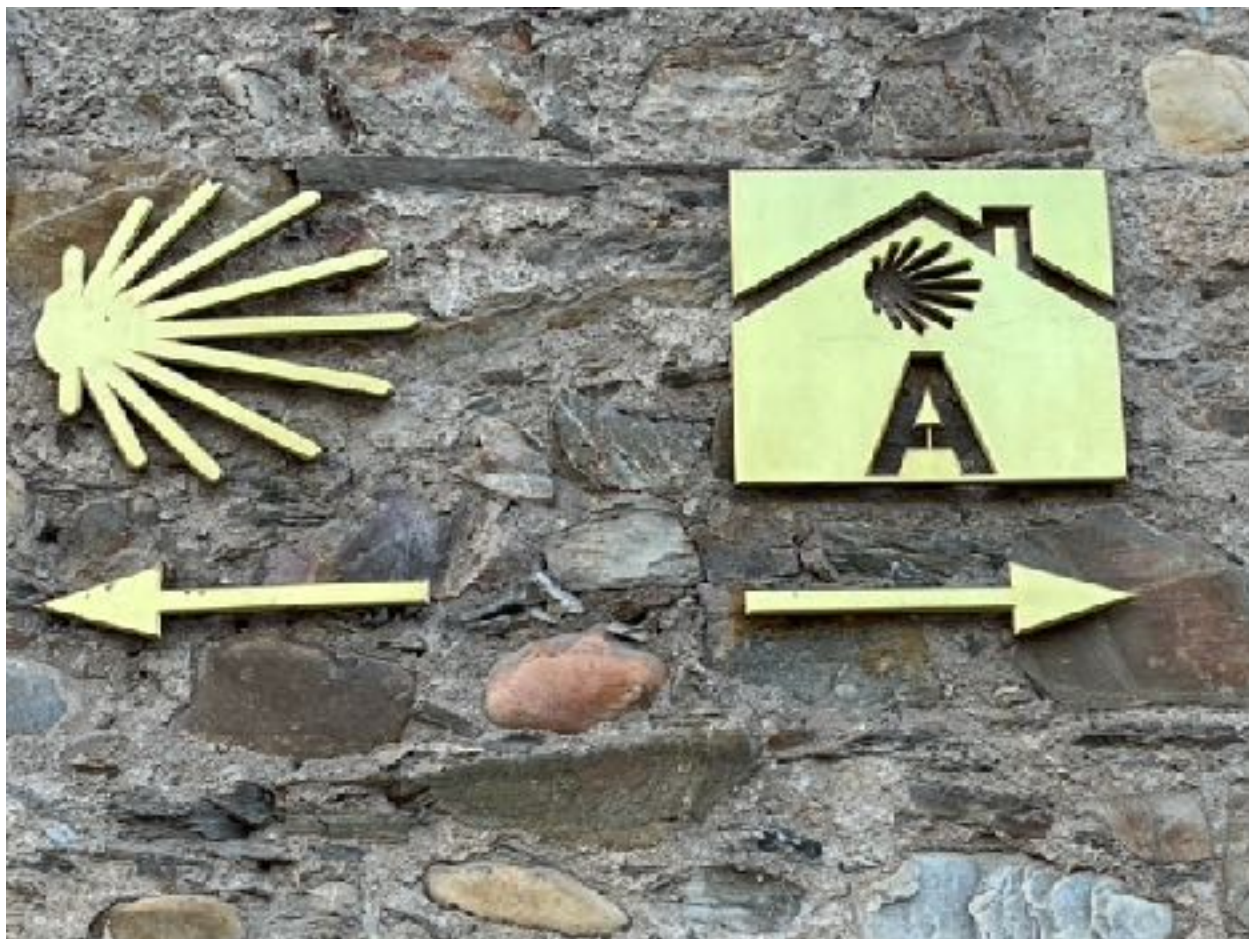
View of Le Medulas (town on left), what remains of the mountain after the Romans washed it away before 200 A.D.



The cave was a vertical shaft that went to a horizontal one



The castle in Ponferrada, down the street from our hotel



Signs for The Camino de Santiago in Ponferrada. I saw a sign for the Camino in Las Médulas also

Ponferraga to Santiago 5/20b

Greetings from Hotel Santiago Plaza!

This morning we ate bread in our room for breakfast, packed up, and left. We took some super highways (auto via) - there are so few vehicles on them! We might pass a vehicle (truck, slow car) every 5 minutes or so. We might be passed by a vehicle (faster car) every 4-5 minutes. It's so different from our interstates! As soon as a vehicle passes another vehicle, it moves back in the slow lane, no one drives slow in the fast lane or stays there after passing. It's all so polite!

Most of the time the length of the viaduct was shown at the beginning of the viaduct. We drove through many tunnels.

We drove to A Coruna. This is a port on the northwest corner of Spain. We finally found a place to eat and a place to park, close together. We ate at the restaurant finally - it took forever for them to make beef barbecue (calf rib bones), French fries, and lettuce and tomato - we must have waited 45 minutes after we gave the order. We also got bread. It was good. Several soccer players (children) and their parents came in to eat. It was extremely noisy in there, the walls amplified the talking.

Then we walked past the soccer fields and the Bay of Biscayne to the Tower of Hercules, a lighthouse, first built by Julius Caesar. Boy, was it windy! My ears ached from the wind blowing on them. We walked to where the next thing north of us is Iceland! The wind was cold! It wasn't so bad walking down the hill with the wind behind us. We drove through a tunnel with many twists and turns under the city of A Coruna near the port.

From there we drove to Santiago de Compostela. It has one of the most significant cathedrals in the Christian world. It is the end of the Camino de Santiago from France and also from other cities in Spain. Pilgrims hike hundreds of miles on the "Way of St. James", the ultimate pilgrimage route, across northern Spain to pay homage to the remains of St. James in this, his namesake city. They dedicate a month of their life to walk the 500 mile Camino from France to Santiago. The route begins in the French foothills of the Pyrenees, in the Basque village of St-Jean-pied-de-Port.

It's now after 10 p.m. and the sun has finally set. It's still somewhat light outside, not dark at all. We rested for a while, then walked the mile and a half or so to the cathedral. A group was singing on a porch next to the side of the cathedral. We walked to the front - I thought there was a shell in the pavement in front of the cathedral, but I didn't see it. We walked down a side street and found a restaurant - he had

clams in a sauce, I had fried peppers - they weren't fried in batter, had large grains of salt on them.

There was a parking garage across the street - several cars a minute went in, a few less came out every minute - they must be making a killing on parking fees! We walked back through Old Town - it was the paseo, when the people walk around the area to be seen and to see their friends. It was crowded there! We continued walking, glad that there are 2 (possibly 2 story each) escalators to go over the train tracks and bus station down to the ground level. As we walked under an underpass, our granddaughter Joanna, 7, called to FaceTime with us - it was great to share some of our experiences with her.

It was about 65, windy, and sunny in Santiago. We walked 4.7 miles today, 5.1 miles yesterday.

It's great to hear from some of you, to know that you are learning something about a foreign country. Thank you for your e-mails and prayers.

Have a good Lord's Day!

God bless you.
Lynne and Steve



Road shot - almost to the tunnels



Another road shot - there were so many mountains on all sides of us!



The Bay of Biscayne in A Coruña.



Tower of Hecules - the original was built by the Romans, this is a replacement lighthouse



The next thing north of here is Iceland!



Soccer fields next to the Bay of Biscayne



The Santiago Cathedral of St. James. The group sitting in the center appeared to have come to the end of their pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago, taking their shoes off to rest their feet.c



AMINO
DE
SANTIAO
MINISTRO
CONSEJO DE MIN
27-10-87

PREMIO PRINCIPE DE ASTURIAS
2004 AO CAMINO
COMO LLGAR DE P
DE ENCONTRO E
POBOS QUE A TRA
SE CONVERTI
DE FRATERNIDAD
DUNHA CONCIENCIA EUROPEA



In pavement in front of Santiago cathedral



High altar



Preparing to swing censor - only done about 12 times a year on holy days (celebrating Ascension Day I guess)



Swinging the censor



The censor is slowing down



St. James, slayer of Moors - on horse in center

Santiago to Segovia 5/21a

Greetings from Hotel Infanta Isabella!

An exciting day!

This morning we walked to the cathedral for the 9:30 service. We arrived in time for a front row seat looking at the high altar. After communion, I noticed 8 men with dark red robes on untying large ropes. I had read that the large, 500 pound censor is used only about 12 times a year for holy days. I'm guessing that they were celebrating Ascension Day. They lowered it to waist high, filled it with incense, then gave it a push, the men pulled hard and it went up in the air - they kept pulling on it and soon it was swinging almost to the ceiling and back across the transept to the other side - they let it swing for a while. Fortunately the incense only went across the transept and did not come into the nave so it didn't bother me - I am very susceptible to smells. After it finished swinging, the service was over. It was exciting to be at the right service on the right day to see the censor swing!

We looked in some of the chapels (many were set up for confession) and also went down in the crypt to see the reliquary of St. James. (I forgot to bring the Rick Steves book with more information on St. James from the car, the hotel took it away for parking, so I will have to give you more information about him tomorrow.)

We walked back toward the hotel, stopping at the bus station cafe for coffee for him and sweet rolls. I asked for a vanilla sweet roll, they gave me one filled with chocolate, it's not my favorite flavor. Oh, well! We checked out of the hotel, walked to our car, loaded it, and started driving.

It took more than 5 hours to drive to Segovia. So many places have beautiful roses blooming - it seems that almost everyone has roses. We saw many backpackers hiking toward Santiago as we drove away from there. At one point we saw a shepherd with his flock (maybe 75 or more) - he was standing with his back to the road and the sheep were crossing a side road and going down a hill. We've never seen a shepherd tending his sheep. We pass many named rios (rivers) and arroyos but rarely see any water in them. It has been a very dry year.

Following the gps here didn't work - it wanted us to go the wrong way up the hill on a one way street to the hotel. After driving around town for a while, Steve figured that if we got on top of the hill, maybe we could find the way. We again got a block from the hotel, to a road which said no entry, but Steve saw the sign that we could enter it for our hotel.

Our room overlooks a pedestrian side street and I can see the cathedral further along the Plaza Mayor. We walked around the plaza, looking at the menus of several restaurants, ate at a cafe. We had Iberian sausage, a cheeseboard, and chickpea hummus. Steve chatted with the 3 men from Switzerland - one of them had been to 70 countries, is headed for the Dominican Republic tomorrow.

We have a chandelier over our bed, but it has no lightbulbs in it. There's a box of 8 chocolates on our bed!

It was 64 today. It was sunny most of the day, but there were dark clouds for a while, had a bit of rain that we passed through close to Segovia, but it is sunny here. Sunset is at 9:32. We walked just shy of 10,000 steps.

Have a good week!

God bless you.
Lynne and Steve

Segovia 5/22b

Greetings!

This morning we went across the way to the bakery, but it didn't open until 9 a.m.! So we went back to our room for 20 minutes before returning there for breakfast. The pastry I chose was like a fruitcake with lots of fruit in between the round layers.

We decided to drive to Valley of the Fallen. We went by way of a mountain road (this one had guard rails). At one point we were over 1900 m in altitude - the valley was way lower than we were. Because of all the twists and turns, we were often going only about 20 mph. At one point we could see the cross across the valley which is at the monument, it was probably about 20 miles away. But when we got there, it is closed on Mondays - we should have checked before we went! Oh, well, tomorrow is another day. We drove back a different route, also a mountain road, but not as high as the first one. It rained on us for a short time.

We returned to our hotel. We then walked to Alcazar, one of the most striking castles in Spain. A castle has stood on this spot since around 1100. During the Middle Ages, this fortified palace was one of the favorite residences of the monarchs of Castile and a key fortress for controlling the region. First we went into the cafeteria and had an Iberian lunch (beef, French fries, tomato, onion, and lettuce, roll), very good. We got the Alcazar audioguide which was well worth the price.

We listened to the audioguide as we walked through the rooms. We crossed the drawbridge over the moat. The castle is built on a promontory at the tip of Segovia's ridge. We learned about the 11 royal rooms. The ceiling of each room was finished with a different design, one had pine cone carvings, another looked like the hull of a

ship. In the Hall of the Monarchs are statues of the 52 rulers of Castile and Leon who presided during the Reconquista (711 - 1492). In the Throne Room of the Fortress (Alcazar) in 1474, Isabella the Catholic Monarch was proclaimed the Queen of Castile. The wedding between King Felipe II and Ana of Austria (his fourth wife) was held here. It burned in 1862, then was remodeled.

From there we walked inside the city wall and into the Segovia Cathedral, built from 1525 - 1768, it was Spain's last major Gothic building. To me the main altar was very simple compared to the altars we have seen. The 22 side chapels were open (usually the metal gates are locked in other churches) and a light sensor turned on the lights when you entered. Off the cloisters was the gilded Chapter Room, draped with Flemish tapestries.

When we came out, we saw that the pavement was wet - it had just begun to drip as we had hurried into the cathedral. We returned to our room to rest.

I found a book in the lobby called "Enjoy Castilla Y Leon", so will give you some information from it:

- *Avila, Segovia, and Salamanca are the 3 cities in Castilla y Leon listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

- *Avilla City Walls were constructed between the 11th and 13th centuries.

- *Salamanca: one of the cultural capitols of Spain.

- *Convent of San Esteban (church): its friars formed the University faculty. It was here that the Catholic Monarchs held an audience with Christopher Columbus to grant their permission for his expedition in America.

- *Segovia: the magnificent aqueduct, dating back to the early 2nd century CE and an enduring example of the forward thinking and robustness that characterized Roman engineering.

We walked towards the aqueduct, found a small store which sold cold food. The man was from Sicily. He made me a loin sandwich

(sausage) and Steve a sausage sandwich. He also brought us each a cold piece of a Spanish omelet on a small slice of bread. He said that only tourists ask for sangria, Spanish people drink tinto verano, so he made that for us (wine and sparkling water, I think he said). It was good.

Then we walked to the aqueduct. It supplies the water for the town of Segovia, even after being built by the Romans in 200 A.D.! That fascinates me! We walked up the steps on the one side of the aqueduct, then climbed up the steps on the other end where it meets the city wall and then goes underground all the way to the Alcazar. We came back to room for a while. We just came back from an attempt to find gelato, but the shops are closed (9 p.m.) We saw a gold shell in the pavement, a sign that is one of the routes of the Camino de Santiago, probably a trail from Madrid.

Notes: In Spain they pump the gas for you. We often see magpies flying. There are numerous roundabouts, most traffic lights are for pedestrians to cross the street. There were numerous swallows flying around the aqueduct.

Hope your day was good.

God bless you.
Lynne and Steve



Valley of the Cross



Roman aqueduct still bringing water to Segovia, built in 200 A.D.



View of a convent from near Alcazar



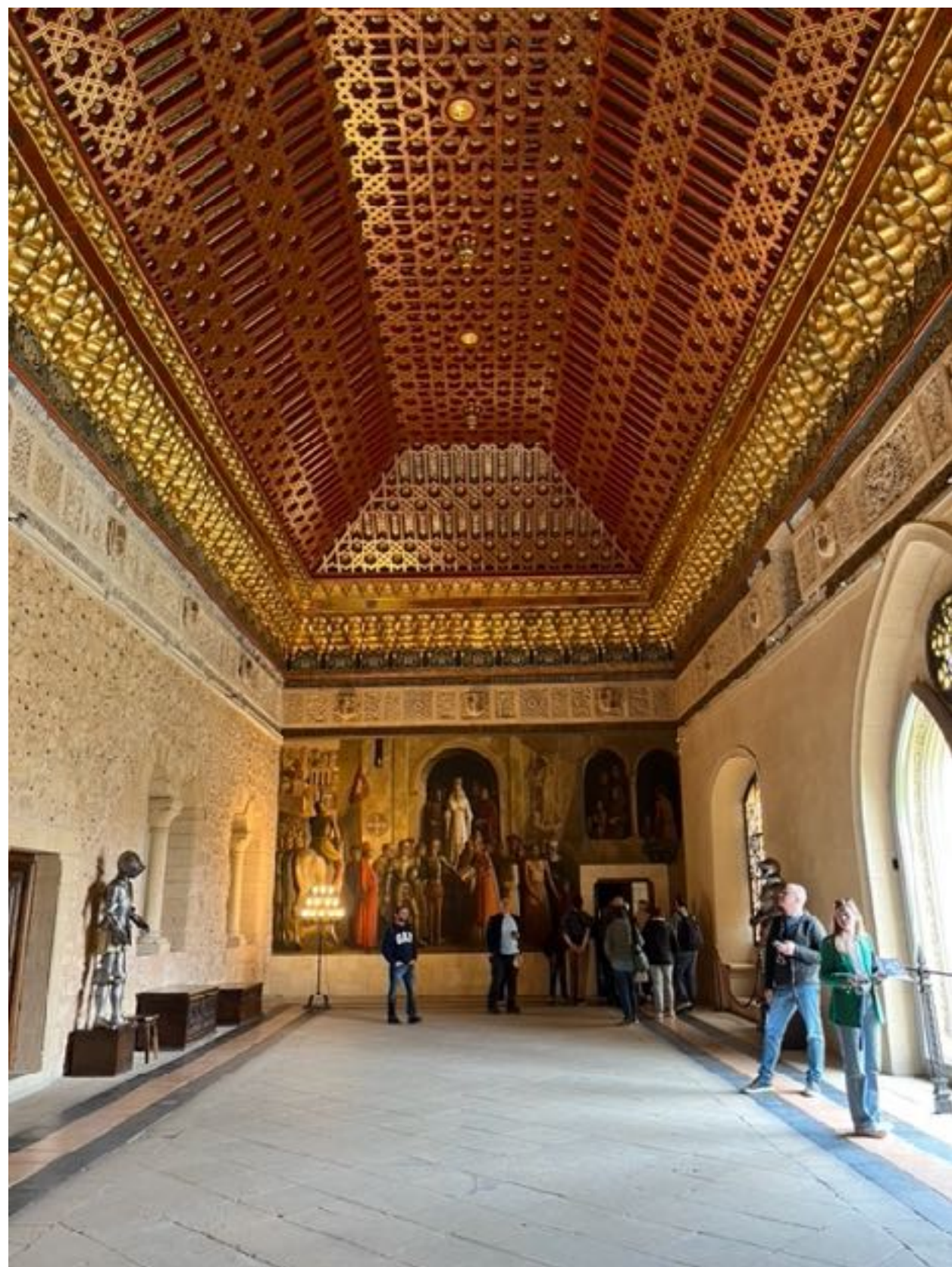
Alcazar in Segovia



Segovia Cathedral from Alcazar



Room of the old palace



Galley Room - painting of Queen Isabel of Castile. All the photos are of Alcazar,



Scissor chair used so a woman could ride a horse



The Royal Bedroom



In the Hall of the Monarchs are statues of the 52 rulers of Castile and Leon who presided during the Reconquista (711 - 1492)



Looking down from the Well Terrace



In the Cathedral: Painting "Tree of Life" shows hedonistic mortals dancing atop the Tree of Life. As a skeletal Grim Reaper prepares to receive them into hell, Jesus rings a bell imploring them to wake up before it's too late.



ALTARE PRIVILEGIATUM
PRODESS ANCTIS

Pilgrim St. James



Cloisters



The snake in the garden



Monstrance used for parading a wafer of Holy Communion around Segovia on Corpus Christus Day



Interesting different facades of buildings



The Segovia aqueduct, built in 200 A.D. still brings the water to the town



We climbed the 41 steps to the aqueduct



We climbed the 106 steps to the city wall



The city wall is behind the man in the background



a gold shell in the pavement, a sign that that is one of the routes of the Camino de Santiago, probably a trail from Madrid.

Segovia to Madrid & photo 5/23



Valley of the Fallen. Jesus' hand on the Pieta is large enough for you to sit on.

Greetings from B & B Hotel!

Yes, we're back here.

This morning we went across the street to the same bakery and got other pastries for breakfast. We packed, waited for our car to be brought to us (they park it in a garage), then left.

We took the same road to Valley of the Fallen as yesterday. But today the road was wet and we had some rain. We also weren't following anyone (yesterday the taxi was going so slowly in front of several cars, including us). We drove up the mountain, finally found the basilica. A 500' tall granite cross marks this immense underground monument to the victims of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Spain's war was between classes and ideologies, dividing every city and village and many families. In 1940 prison workers dug 220,000 tons of granite out of the hill to form an underground basilica. It is 300 yards long, built to be longer than St. Peter's, but the Vatican had the final say when it blessed only 262 of those yards. It's nearly empty, has a few side chapels, has copies of 16th century Brussels tapestries along the sides. Interred behind the high altar and side chapels are the remains of approximately 34,000 people, including both Franco's Nationalists and anti-Franco Republicans who lost their lives in the war. There are 95 steps up from the parking lot to the basilica. Then there are a flight of steps down and another flight up to enter the nave.

We then drove to El Escorial, a few kilometers away. A car pulled out so we could park on the street. We walked a few blocks, found a bar to eat in. There wasn't much choice, Steve chose something that looked like a black sausage - it wasn't sausage but was made with pig's blood and rice (rather tasty). I chose a sort of salad - it had peas, cooked carrots (cut to the size of peas), red pepper, fish, in a sauce. It was good. It was raining when we went back to the car -

Steve needed change to feed the parking meter, got it at the restaurant.

We discovered that the monastery was only 2 blocks away from where we were parked. We didn't carefully read the doorpost at the entrance, so walked around the building, had to come back to that entrance. When Spain defeated France in a crucial 1557 battle, a grateful King Philip II (1527-1598) vowed to build a grand structure to the glory of God: the Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. The sprawling structure would serve God in several ways: as a monastery to further the Catholic faith, a school to promote knowledge, a mausoleum to honor Spanish royalty, and a palace to provide respite from the bustle of Madrid. It is held to be the eighth wonder of the world, built between 1562 and 1584. It is also full of numerous staircases - we've climbed up and down 100s of steps - it's on 4 floors. No handicapped access here or in most places we've been to. (No photos allowed in it.)

We started in the Royal Library. Founded by Philip II as a leading center of Renaissance scientific and humanistic knowledge, it is among the world's greatest historic libraries. All of the books have their spines toward the back of the shelves and the edges of the pages are gilded, so it appears to be full of gold. There are paintings and globes. The barrel ceiling is richly painted. The Basilica is one of the most outstanding examples of Spanish Renaissance architecture. The Chapter Houses (meeting place of monks or nuns) was also beautifully decorated. There was a Pantheon of the Infantes (built in the 19th century for members of the royal family who were not kings or queens, and a Royal Pantheon with the tombs of kings and queens of Spain. We walked through the Habsburg Palace which is comprised of the King's Apartments and the Queen's Apartments. The Battle Room is a gallery decorated with magnificent paintings of war scenes and battles. It was where the queen and her children could walk - I sure wouldn't want to spend my free time walking among scenes of battles! The last section was the Bourbon Palace which was used by the Bourbon monarchs during their seasonal (autumn) stays as El

Escorial. Because of the time on the parking meter we went very quickly through the monastery.

Then we drove to Madrid. We dropped our suitcases off at the hotel, then drove to the train station to return the car. But we couldn't find the way into the rental car parking lot. We walked to the rental place, an employee showed us how to get to the return lot - it is unmarked, very frustrating for us who don't know where to go! We then walked the mile back to the hotel, getting wet as it rained off and on - should have taken the subway back!

We rested a bit, then went towards Plaza Mayor to get gelato. He got Bourbon chocolate, I got violet. We returned to the hotel, went to Coffee Center, picked up some cookies, juice, coffee for him. We've been resting. We walked over 15,000 steps (6.4 miles, the third most in a day on this trip, at least 20 flights of stairs.

I said I would educate you about St. James. James and his brother John were fishermen, called by Jesus to be His disciples. St. James, after Jesus' death, spent a decade as a missionary to northwest Spain. The legend goes that as soon as he returned home to the Holy Land, in AD 44 James was beheaded by Herod Agrippa. Two of his disciples brought his body back to Spain in a small boat and entombed it in the hills of Galicia, carefully hiding it from the Roman authorities. It lay hidden for almost eight centuries. In 813, a monk, supposedly directed by the stars, discovered the tomb, and the local bishop proudly exclaimed that it was St. James. Thus Santiago de Compostela was born. Historians figure the "discovery" of the remains of St. James in Spain provided a way to rally Europe against the Moors. He eventually became Spain's patron saint.

You must show your passport at the hotels, to show our age to get senior citizen entrance fees.

Hope your day was good.

God bless you.
Lynne and Steve



Pretty building. We went to the 8th floor observation deck.



Looking down



Model of Santa Maria in Naval Museum



Roman high pressure water pump in Naval Museum



Funerary stela for Quartulms holding basket for ore and pick - he worked in the mine.
He was 4! In Archaeological Museum



Candlesticks of Lebrija, late 8th-early 7th century B.C., representation of a Phoenician deity

Madrid 5/24d

Hi!

This morning we went to the Coffee Corner for coffee and juice and ate our Breakfast Bag treats.

We headed for Sol Plaza, caught the subway to Retiro, then started walking the wrong way. Eventually I convinced him that he should check the gps on the phone and we turned around. We came to a pretty building - I noticed that it had tourist information, so we went in. It also had an eighth floor observation deck, so we got tickets and took the elevator to the 6th floor, showed our tickets and got a different elevator to the observation deck. After walking all around and overlooking the city, we headed down.

We walked to the next building, the Navy Museum. The exhibits were in Spanish and English. We read about some of the naval history of Spain, saw models of ships from Viking times on, lots of portraits, figureheads, information about different wars. Occasionally there were padded benches to sit on which I used!

Then we walked to the National Archeological Museum. But their cafeteria was closed, so we went a few blocks away, found Santa Glory where we each had a sandwich. They were delicious. For the first time I got a plastic bottle of coke with a screw-on lid, all the other cokes have been in glass bottles.

We then went back to the Archeological Museum. Unfortunately the second floor was closed. We looked at what we had missed on the first floor. We were going to leave when I realized that there were exhibits on the third floor. So we saw the exhibits of Spain helping out

in Egypt before the Aswan Dam was built and some of the articles that they brought to Spain. We also saw exhibits of early Roman life.

We were tired. We went back to the subway, took it to Sol, then returned here. We are tired and worn out from so much walking and sightseeing. We rested some. Then we went out for tapas. We wandered around Plaza Mayor, looking at menus until we found food we would like. We ordered a Tinto Verano and it came with a very small bowl of potato chips (often if you order a drink, you get a small bowl of appetizers with it). He had a open black bread sandwich with squid in batter, I had blue cheese with walnuts and honey toast. We had to order a second drink to finish our meal.

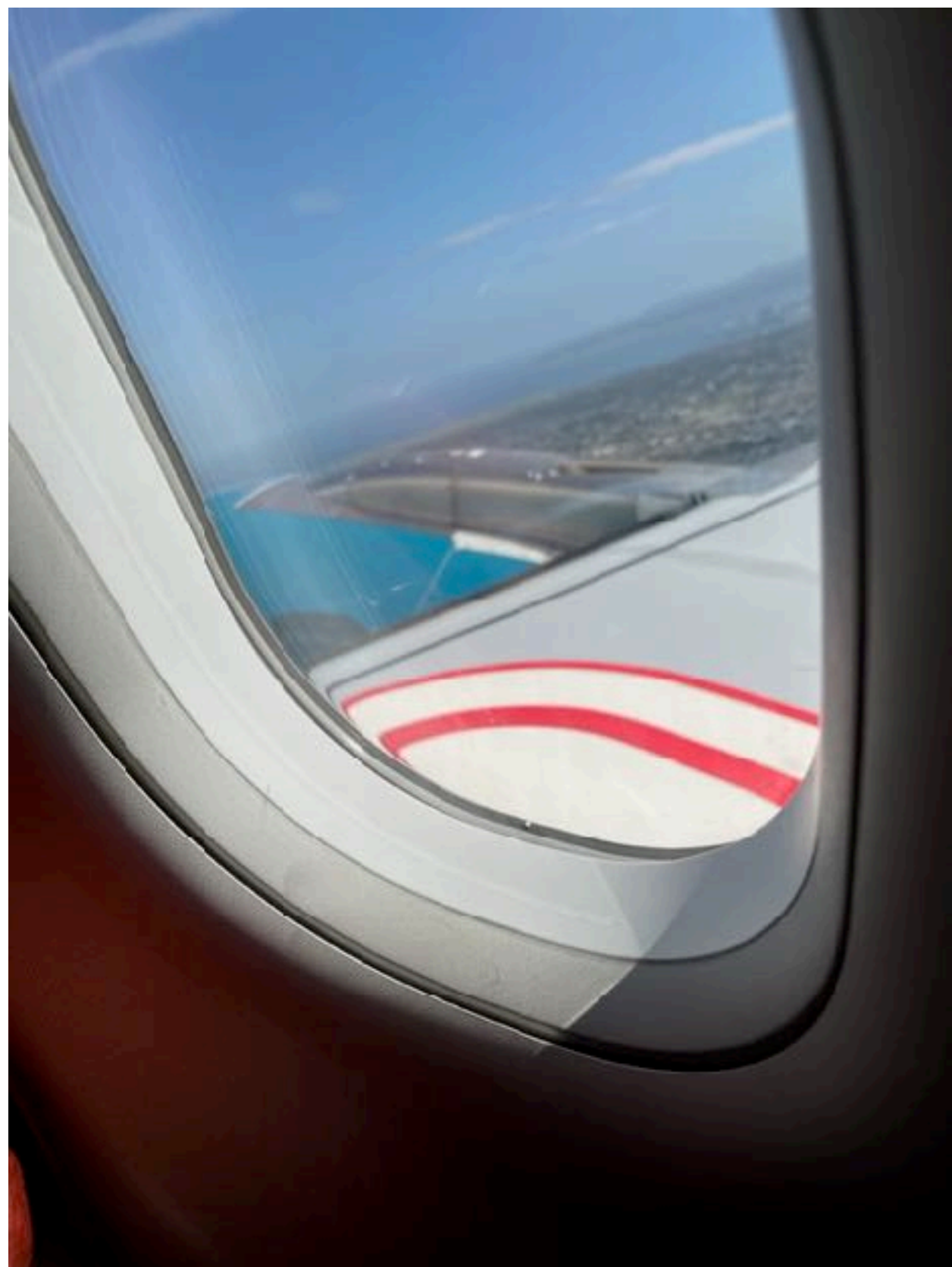
Then we walked into Plaza Miguel and into the market where they have trendy food. We finally found what we thought tapas would be: small plates. All of the tapas we have had were more like a sandwich plate, not a very small plate. We returned to B&B Hotel, then chatted with the hotelier for a while - she speaks good English, is lonely just waiting for someone to check in, it's not as busy as big hotels. She is a college student, studied tourism, but now wants to get into fashion. She lives in Madrid.

Tomorrow we get up early (midnight in Baltimore), take the subway to the train station, take a bus from there to the airport. We fly an Aer Lingus to Dublin, change planes, then fly to Dulles Airport in VA. Since we will have been up so many hours, it's not safe for us to drive home. We will stay at a nearby hotel, then rent a car on Friday morning to drive home. Then starts the work: watering the plants, sorting through 3 weeks of mail and junk mail, doing the wash, etc.!

Please continue to pray for a safe trip home without problems and for good health. We appreciate all your prayers, and also all your e-mails.

It was sunny, now cloudy, about 70.

God bless you.
Lynne and Steve





Tinto Verano He had a open black bread sandwich with squid in batter, I had blue cheese with walnuts and honey toast.



Small tapas (\$2 - 2.50)



Plaza Mayor



Over a store. The chicken moves, the hour glass moves, the man's right hand moves



Our last night in Spain in Plaza Mayor

5/26

Greetings from home!

This morning we ate the hotel breakfast, packed, then had the shuttle driver take us back to the airport. Then we got the AvisBudget shuttle to take us to the car rental place. We rented a car - turned out it was a Honda H-RV - I thought Hondas weren't rental cars, but this was.

We started driving back, but Dad missed a turn, so we ended up driving through towns southwest of D.C. (Arlington and Falls Church)

before we finally found our way to the D.C. beltway. It was moving well, the fastest we've ever driven that stretch (and we used to drive it when we went canoeing). The outer loop of the beltway was stopped, so we were glad we were going northeast then.

We were home by 11:30. We brought the suitcases in, I watered my inside and deck plants. I did a load of wash. Meanwhile Dad turned the sprinkler on on the garden - we let it run there for hours. I also went through the mail. We had lunch, returned the car, went to Aldi's. I did another load of wash - it dried well!

Thank you for your prayers and wishes for safe travels. We had them! It's great to be home!

We unpacked, did miscellaneous things around the house. We tried to FaceTime with Joanna but it didn't work, so we chatted on the phone. We had a good chat. I read.

I started weeding the garden - the plants are growing but the weeds in the back section are a couple of feet high. I weeded about 15% of the garden - with the sprinkling it was much easier to pull the weeds. I need to weed this section so I can get sweet potato plants and plant them.

It was sunny, about 74.

Katherine, I guess I was confused - almost every country we've traveled in has spoken a different language than English and Ireland is a European country so I figured, without thinking about it, that they would speak another language.

Have a good weekend!

God bless you!
Love, Mom