

Notes from Europe: Week One

Greetings from Le Thillot, France, nestled in the Vosges Mountains!



We have just arrived here after a four hour journey by car from Joachim's home town of Oehringen, Germany. The drive itself has been successful in moving us into a different time and place. Life is about to slow way down for my busy family and that is just what this side trip is all about. We've had a fully packed first half of 2016 and now just beyond the halfway point, we are taking this well earned nature break. The two most stressful decisions of the next few days will be what we will prepare for mittagessen (midday meal) and which hiking trail to choose each morning. These decisions will be made that much easier as our AirBnB house sits next to an organic farm selling seasonal veggies and is on the edge of the forest with a myriad of trails just footsteps from the front door. This is exactly what an ideal Hubele family vacation looks like!



So why is nature so important to us? Both Joachim and I fully recognize that we spend the majority of our day in front of computer screens. Fortunately my time also involves contact with a host of amazing clients but Joachim's screen is filled with data- yikes!!! Given that fact, we crave the restorative effect nature delivers. We do carve out a slice at the start of each day for swimming at Barton Springs and a weekend hike when it's not 100+ degrees, but that just doesn't compare to a stretch of time surrounded by fresh mountain air, magnificent trees, birdsong, and picturesque meadows. And even though Sebastian has his nature fix built into his schedule with a full day each week of the school year devoted to Earth Native

Wilderness School he always still desires more as well.



The Vosges are home to some beautiful bodies of water. Gérardmer is the most famous along with the smaller, quieter neighboring Longemer. I happen to have a preference for Longemer and have wonderful memories of spending some of the last warm days of fall on its shore with Sebastian when he was only 18 months old. Returning now 13 years later will be a highlight for all of us. We certainly have plans to visit both lakes for a swim at least once during our stay and hope to also discover some new spots.

Recharging ourselves in nature is now backed up by some wonderful science. UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center put together quite a report in 2016 and shared the findings last March in The Huffington Post. How Nature can make you Kinder, Happier, and More Creative sounds exactly like the answer we have all been searching for in the light of our

world and domestic situation. Who couldn't benefit from a large dose of kindness, happiness, and creativity? I love this quote as it confirms exactly what I get out of a day in nature:

"Nature restores mental functioning in the same way that food and water restore bodies. The business of everyday life – dodging traffic, making decisions and judgment calls, interacting with strangers – is depleting, and what man-made environments take away from us, nature gives back."



I am thrilled that we have my mother-in-law along with us on this journey. At 82 she may even still out-hike all of us! As our only living parent between Joachim and I, she has an incredible place of honor in our family and I am continually in awe of the life lessons she teaches me. Widowed two years ago, after ten years as the caretaker for the love of her life, she is living a whole new chapter, writing her own new script as she goes. When she can find peers to keep up with her, she will easily take a 20 mile bike trip on the weekend or cross country ski for a day. She's been a vegetarian for 30 years and eats what she grows in her own garden. That's what

82 can look like by the way!



Since the fun has only just begun, be sure to follow me on Instagram or Facebook to enjoy the beautiful scenery right along with us.

Live Well,
Lauren