

Our Escape to Colditz

Keith is a huge history enthusiast and has expressed a desire to visit Colditz Castle for as long as I've known him. In fact, we **almost made it there in Bluebell the Motorhome** in 2016, however decided to stay in Austria and revisit another time when we were a little more prepared. The opportunity finally arose this year as I decided to book tickets for Keith's Christmas present – the man who has every gadget under the sun – and it went down brilliantly! Due to work commitments, I decided that rather than drive, we would grab a quick weekend return flight from Stansted to Berlin, however I've includ-

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ed motorhome/campervan stopovers too on this blog.

We stayed overnight prior to flying at the **Holiday Inn Express Stansted**, which was convenient as it offers onsite parking and evening meals – we wouldn't arrive until gone 8pm following work so would need dinner. Free breakfast was also offered, and was actually very pleasant despite it being 5am! A shuttle bus took us to the departures terminal in just 7 minutes at a cost of £3pp.

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10.30am local time on Friday saw us touch-down at Berlin Schönefeld airport and by 11am we had picked up our wheels for the weekend - a VW Golf hired from Sixt.com. They did manage to sneak some added extras on which meant we ended up spending over €100 extra to the hire charge which was

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a bit of an irritating beginning.

Although we had flown to Berlin, due to the regularity of flights available to ensure we got the most time possible from our limited time away, our destination was 2 hours south – Leipzig. It is possible to fly direct to Leipzig however they only fly twice a week from Stansted and it didn't work timing wise for us.

Leipzig is a very exciting place to visit as a musician, and I can't help but feel that it's massively overlooked on the tourist trail. Leipzig was home to J.S.Bach, who worked at Thomaskirche as the Kapellmeister for many years.

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His family, many of whom were also musicians, also were based in Leipzig, and although their family home no longer exists because of WW2 Damage, the cathedral does and their neighbours and friends house is now The Bach Museum and Archives.

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Inside the church you can see Bach's grave along with many very rare and historical musical instruments from the Baroque Period.

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We were lucky enough to hear the organist perform some Bach's Organ Pieces which was incredibly moving and really very exciting.

Our visit to the Bach Museum also didn't disappoint, we got to see some very rare, handwritten by Bach manuscript, which was ridiculously neat and just completely awesome to see. (No pics allowed)

We did some of the **Music Trail** although time was not on our side - you could easily enjoy 2 days + here. Other famous musicians who are linked to Leipzig are Felix Mendelssohn's who died here- his house is now a museum which we'd have liked to have visited but we ran out of time, and Richard Wagn-

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er.

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During the walking tour we enjoyed looking at some of the beautiful buildings which have survived the war including the opera house.

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We also stumbled across a traditional winter fayre, which was a great chance to warm up with some Gluwein.

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We had three delicious meals in Leipzig - lunch at **Ratskeller**, a really atmospheric beerhouse which serves local Saxon Fayre, a bratwurst at the winter fayre, and finally our evening meal at the historic and atmospheric **Auerbachs Keller** and tried loads of absolutely delicious local beer and even a Leipzig

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gin!



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Our home for the night was the **Mercure Hotel** which is just down the road from Mendelssohn's house and had an underground carpark for us to leave the car whilst we explored on foot.

On Saturday we were up fairly early and checked out at 9am. Keith was very excited as today was our trip to Colditz Castle. His reaction as we caught our first sight of the beautiful looking castle was priceless.

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I'd booked us the **extended tour** (€18 pp payable in cash on arrival) and we were surprised to learn that we were the only one booked on the tour – so it was to be a private tour – an unexpected perk of being out of season. Our guide Steffi, began leading us around the vast corridors, cellars, and

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grounds, giving us brilliant commentary throughout.



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Colditz Castle is a striking Renaissance Castle, sat perched on a large rocky outcrop, high above the River Mulde and became best known during WW2 - it was used as a High Security Prisoner of War camp for allied officers who had repeatedly tried to escape from other POW camps. Despite being considered as a high security camp, it had the highest number of successful escape attempts and only one assassination, and that was, according to Steffi, an accident. Prisoners here were treated with respect and a little more dignity than elsewhere and had huge libraries to peruse, a fully functional theatre in which they used to put on full scale productions and also the dorms were less crammed in and some officers even had their own rooms which were bigger than you may ex-

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pect.

During the tour we got to see the famous gap in which Pat Reid managed to escape from – he later went on to develop the famous boardgame “Escape from Colditz”;



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The

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French tunnel which ran 44m in length right underneath the chapel

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The end of the British tunnel

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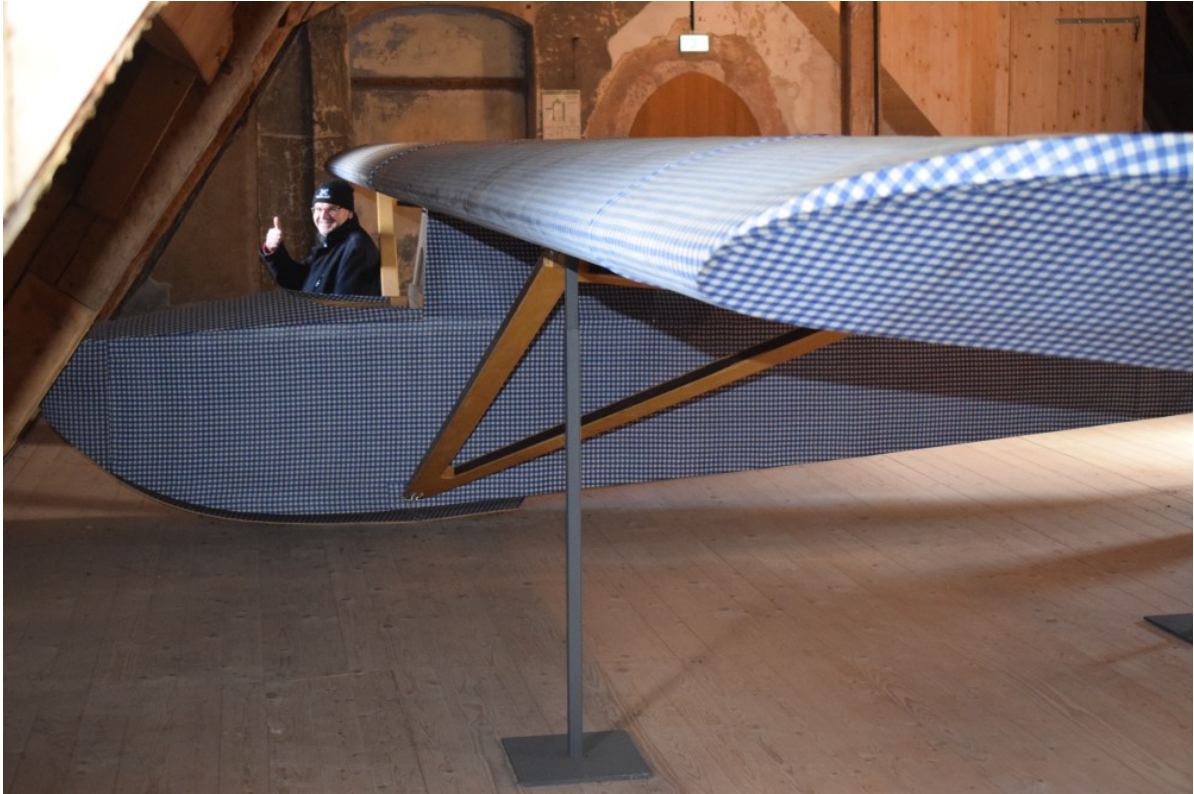


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the attic room where the famous glider was built in secret and found when the Americans liberated the castle



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and much more. We saw the theatre, complete with secret trap door under the stage,

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the officers rooms, the British Dorms, and heard story after story of escape efforts – some successful and some not. Despite the nature of the history here it was hard not to feel inspired here, the sheer determination of those who were held here almost lives on in the walls, its just truly fascinating – even for someone who isn't such a history buff as her husband!

Our tour was supposed to last 2 hours, but Steffi, encouraged by our enthusiasm and interest I think, showed us some extra places and we actually ended up being there for over 3 hours!

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There is a **Campsite** within walking distance if you go in your campervan/motorhome and also a **Stellplatz** (overnight parking area) in the next town - although Colditz is very small and I'm not sure I'd fancy driving our old motorhome up to the castle.

Our final stop of the trip was 1.5 hours down the road on the border of Czech Republic, at Bastei. This addition to our itinerary was last minute after reading about it in the Lonely Planet Germany Book and my goodness are we pleased we discovered it.

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Bastei is a large area of rock formations which tower 194m high above the River Elbe. There is a fabulous bridge nestled amongst the rocks and lots of viewing platforms dotted around - some of which aren't for the faint hearted, especially when they are covered in ice and snow as they were for our visit!



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I managed to put my big girl pants on and conquered them all, despite a few deep controlling breathes and jelly legs as you can just about see from this pic!



We managed an hour of exploring the paths before we lost the sunlight

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and enjoyed a bratwurst sausage and beer (alcohol free for me being Des, but it was fab!!) at the kiosk just as they shut, before returning to our car and discovering a car parking ticket -whoops!

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Our journey back to Berlin Schönefeld Airport took just under 2 hours, where we stayed in an **airport hotel** (which was grim but served its purpose) ready for our extremely early 06.30 flight back home. We had a lovely traditional meal of Schnitzel at the local **Gasthaus** – which we needed to drive to as there was nowhere within walking distance of the hotel and no restaurant at the hotel. Check out the size of those Schnitzel's!

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We had a brilliant time – and can't believe we were actually only in Germany for a day and a half. We covered 582km/361m and found German roads brilliant. A note to myself, next time the car hire kiosk asks me if I would prefer automatic or manual – get automatic! I kept going for an invisible gear stick!

Until Next Time (which won't be long as this time next week we will be in the Lake District for half term in Ruby- woo)

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