

Day 1 – Monday 20 December 1999

The day has finally arrived, all the planning and preparation of the previous months is about to launch us on our 25th wedding anniversary tour of the USA. It's great to have close and dear friends like Robin and John Bakss to drive us to the airport to catch flight QF25 to Los Angeles via Auckland NZ.

The feeling of excitement as we board the plane is hard to explain but Robyn being the more level headed is trying to calm me down. But how would you feel being a big kid at heart about to undertake the trip of a lifetime? Exploring a new land, cultures, sights, sounds, smells until now only seen of the television and in the movies.

As we board the Jumbo it wasn't hard to notice the different classes of comfort and although we were travelling 'cattle class', one day we will experience business or first class with the extra leg room and wider seats and the extra attention from the cabin crew.

I must say though the comfort of economy class isn't all that bad really given the number of people being loaded into the plane.

The first leg of the flight was at 37,000 feet and took 3 hours and 25 minutes covering a distance of 1426 miles. Flying conditions were clam as we tasted fine Qantas food and relaxed with in-flight movies and shows.

Arriving early at Auckland gave us plenty of time to walk around the duty free shops and get some blood pumping as the next leg was going to be very long. I see now why Qantas flies to Auckland as several airlines have joined together to form 'One World' with passengers coming from other parts of Australia and New Zealand to fill the empty seats.

While shopping duty free we bought out legal limit of scotch and brandy to enjoy in the US and particularly in Taos Valley ski resort where we will spend a white Christmas and see in the new millennium.

Conspicuous by his looks and physique was Mike Gatting and a team of young cricketers from the UK no doubt heading back to the UK for Christmas. It puzzled me though why Mike Gatting wasn't upgraded to business or first class given his standing in the cricketing world but guess he had to stay with the team, maybe they could pick me!!!!

Flying at 39,000 feet toward Los Angeles, a distance of 6522 miles we struck several pockets of air turbulence, nothing serious but enough to warrant the 'fasten seatbelt's sign to be turned on. The food and wine together with the company was great, but the 11 hours 25 minutes is 'cattle class' started to show as we neared the USA coastline.

Touch down at last and with the assistance of the cabin crew to fill in our immigration and customs declaration forms paid off as we walked through the crowds without having to open bags. LAX is not one of the 7 airports in the world for style or architecture, but as I sit here in our hotel, it is efficient as I see the number of aircraft movements using the 4 runways.

Using the airport shuttle bus was great, simply wait at the appropriate location and you are whisked away from the hustle and bustle and before long checked in to the hotel. Early check in at the Crown

Plaza provided a welcome bed, view of the runways; a couple of hours snooze and ready to get Los Angeles, this hotel at the airport is a pilots dream.

Santa Monica has the 'Big Blue Bus' where for 50 cents it takes you anywhere in Los Angeles to the beach and the famous pier. After catching the bus outside the Marriott Hotel we spent a pleasant afternoon walking the pier and the beach watching the sun slowly set in the west over the Pacific Ocean. A perfect golden sunset which really started at about 3:30pm making you feel it was about 5:00pm, or maybe we were still feeling the effects of jet lag.

While Santa Monica is no Mooloolaba or Surfers Paradise, it does have a unique character, particularly at sunset as the orange horizon blends into deepening shades of blue as you look higher and higher into the sky. A perfect colour scheme for a plane paint job.

Back at the hotel at last at around 8:00pm and the feeling of accomplishment of the first day of adventure which started yesterday in Australia but is the same day here in the USA.

After a couple of drinks it was time to call it a day since we had been on the move from 5:00am Monday morning in Australian time and it was now 10:00pm Los Angeles time (Monday) or 3:00pm Tuesday in Australia, a total of 34 hours crossing the international dateline and the equator.

Tomorrow in a brand new day.