

Leg 9 – San Diego (birth place of California)

Day 39 – Thursday 27 January 2000

Our Amtrak train ride to San Diego started after we were dropped off at the station by the hotel van. As there was no baggage check in we took our entire luggage on to the train with us. As we went further south the countryside changed dramatically becoming very dry, brown, no running water in the water ducts, more clusters of gum trees surrounded by dry brown grass or dirt, just looked like country Australia during the summer months.

At this stage of our holiday both of us are looking forward to ‘not living out of a suitcase’, getting clothes out of a draw and being able to sleep in our own bed and walk around the house instead of hotel rooms. Funny thing also I am looking forward to mowing the lawn and using the wiper snipper to tidy up the edges, stage isn’t it.

Anyway, here we are sitting in the train at 11:00am and its 65 Fahrenheit while in the East its 10 Fahrenheit, such a contrast in temperatures. I know we are in the information age where access is 24/7 via mobile phones and Internet enabled laptop computers etc., but what I can stand in a confined space like a train are people who talk at the top of their voice into their mobile phones having conversations about all sorts of private topics not aware (or maybe they are) the rest of the carriage are listening. The nationality and country makes no difference but manners, etiquette and being polite seems to count for nothing in the I/me/myself self-centred age.

Some parts of the countryside have sufficient water and fertile soil to grow strawberries, cabbage, lettuce and other vegetables. Also there are times when the rail track follows the shore line and gives a great view of the sea, sandy beaches, lifesaver towers, boats, surfers riding the small waves, and people on the beach between San Clemente to just outside San Diego.

Just north of Oceanside there are three (3) warships anchored off the cost and there is a hive of activity as Chinook helicopters track between the ships and Camp Joseph H. Pendleton U.S.M.C. base, a huge complex on both sides of the railway line. The base has line after line of tents, communication towers, barracks, airfield and other military facilities.

As we go further south there are many seaside villages and resorts along the coastal shoreline but then the train heads inland away from the coast past the International Airport and on into the station at San Diego making the 2 hour trip very interesting with the changing scenery.

The shuttle bus for the Ramada Hotel picked us up from the station and took us to Old Town and hotel which I think is the best we have stayed in so far for its size, coffee maker, microwave, fridge and king-size bed and a balcony looking over an internal courtyard with fountains, swimming pool and outside tables and chairs.

We walked a short distance to Old Town State Park with its historical buildings, the oldest ‘Casa de Machado y Silva’ (1830) where the Mexican flag was hidden from American troops during the war. The whole area is made up of original or reconstructed buildings as they try to return the town to its former glory. For the residents it’s important to preserve the history of the region as it was here the original town was established before Alonzo Horton arrived in 1876 and decided the best place for a

city is by the waterfront. He purchased 800 acres of land for 33 cents an acre and convinced the population to follow him resulting in the original site becoming a ghost town and fell into disrepair.

All around the Old Town are Spanish designed buildings with distinctive colour schemes and gardens with very few European styled buildings to be found. I have just read a paper and the oldest building is 'Cascade Carrillo' built in 1821 by Captain Ruiz and is an original adobe and is the oldest building in California. The only thing that looks out of place are the gum trees in the park and I wonder if they will be removed returning the whole site to its natural vegetation as well.

Tonight on the television President Clinton gave his 'State of the Union' address which sounds like an election policy speech even though he cannot stand again at the next election. Many of his policies have all ready been implemented in Australia and as the commentators say it all sounds good but the incoming President will push his own agenda and present his own budget to both houses, but hey, looked good, sounded good, lots of people clapped and God saved America. On that note we all slept peacefully.

Day 40 – Friday 28 January 2000

A perfect start to the day as we were able to have toast for breakfast, only the Ramada in Albuquerque had toast, all the others has sweet pastries etc., see I told you this hotel was the best. The temperature is a little cooler today however we set off on the number 9 bus to Sea World and a day of adventure and looking forward to seeing the 3 of the 4 shows put on during winter.

The first show was the Dolphin Show which was exciting, especially for those sitting in the splash zone, we referred to see their reaction to the waves of water going all over them rather than experiencing it ourselves. The second show was the bird show which was unusual as I have never seen trained birds perform before, very clever. The third show was the Shamu Show with killer whales more or less following the same routines as the dolphins except the whales make more of a splash and the water spray covers a greater area. Many of the displays of whales, seals and sea lions, polar bears, sea turtles, crabs and penguins are well set out giving plenty of viewing opportunities.

Having had a great time at Sea World we decided to take the electric trolley car into town, very fast and efficient and provided us with a great view of the surroundings. Trying to decide what to eat for tea was tough as most of the food outlets are Mexican and hot so we chickened out and bought a couple of TV dinners from the local supermarket, heated them up in the microwave and sat back for the rest of the evening in our room preparing for an early start tomorrow.

Day 41 – Saturday 29 January 2000

A cooler day with marine layer (fog) covering the sea and much of the land as we head off on our city tour and visit to the San Diego Zoo in the afternoon.

San Diego was first discovered by Juan Cabrillo in 1542 but he named it San Miguel since that day was the feast of Saint Michael the Archangel. However 60 years later in 1602 another Spaniard visited the port and renamed it San Diego. Vizcaíno (Spanish explorer) and was celebrating the day of the glorious San Diego and a hut was built and mass was said in celebration of the feast of San Diego.

In 1769 Father Serra dedicated the first Mission as Mission San Diego de Alcala after a Franciscan Friar; Saint Didacus (translated to San Diego who was made a saint by Pope Sixtus V in 1588). It wasn't until 1848 when the end of the Mexican war saw the establishment of American government and the declaration of the border between USA and Mexico. Since then San Diego has established itself as a military town and a strategic link in the whole USA military defence network.

San Diego is the boot camp for all marines west of the Mississippi and has satellite communications training centre, facilities to build the TITAN rockets, home for the US Naval Air Station where the Top Gun pilots are trained and we drove past the café made famous in the Top Gun movie starring Tom Cruise, Kelly McGillis, Anthony Edwards and Meg Ryan.

Due to the dry weather people in many of the hills and valleys plant 'ice plant', a natural ground cover fire retardant from South Africa to prevent fire reaching houses and buildings.

Our first visit was to La Jolla pronounced La Hoya which actually means 'cave or hollow pit' and there are 4 major caves along the cliff face, however the locals call it 'The View' spelt 'La Jolleya'. I agree with the locals, what a view on the wide sandy beaches, surfboard riders, deep sea divers, palm trees, parks, beach towers and at one end of the beach there is an outcrop of rocks providing protection and a sea wall for the seals. A lifeguard tower and fence prevent people trying to get too close to the seals as they can charge and attack you if you invade their space.

Homes in this area go for anywhere between \$250,000 and \$15 million depending on the view and style of home. From here we followed the coastline looking at shops, restaurants and points of interest through Pacific Beach where they have the 'Crystal Pier Hotel' with its rooms built out over the ocean so you can throw out a fishing line and catch your evening meal.

Further south is Mission Beach (nothing like the one in Cairns, Australia) and still has its famous wooden roller coaster in Belmont Park. Not as scary as the modern rides but noted for the smell of grease and its history. Inland of Mission Blvd. is a huge bay with marinas, yacht clubs, sporting areas, parks, beaches and Sea World where we were yesterday.

From here we got back to the 70 style houses made up of former workers cottages' when there were orange orchards and housed the migrant workers. They have the only 'doggie' beach where dog owners can let their dogs roam free. Ocean Beach also has the longest pier and people come here during the storms when the huge surf comes right across the pier and washes them into the ocean. We were warned not to come here at night as it does get a little rough with many fights etc.

As we head up over Sunset Cliffs you can get a magnificent view of the coastline north to west, then San Diego bay as you come down the east side and La Playa with all its marinas which has a huge multimillion boat called 'Ultimate Hooker' and looks like some of the huge boats on sale at the Sanctuary Cove boat show on the Gold Coast in Queensland.

Across the road from the International Airport is the Coast Guard who have a landing strip which goes across North Harbor Drive and when there are aircraft movements they have to close the road. It is really strange to see the airport in the middle of the city with planes lower than the high rise buildings as they come into land. There are plans to move the airport as the current curfew is 11:30pm due to the noise.

The only part of Downtown San Diego that remains original is Gaslamp Quarter, the historical heart where the buildings are protected and cannot be pulled down only remodelled internally. Like many of the cities in the USA the homeless and beggars hassle you for money even though there are signs everywhere for 'jobs', 'position vacant' and 'immediate start'.

Our last venture for the day was the San Diego Zoo and with only 4 hours available we knew we would have to be selective in what we wanted to see. We took the bus for a 35 minute tour through the zoo with expert commentary by the guide and this helped us decide where to go and we could see around 75% of all the exhibits and enclosures from the top of the double decker bus with its open top and sides, a perfect way to look down into the enclosures.

We decided to take the Skyfari over the top of the zoo to the highest point and walk back down the many themes with the plants and animals from various regions of the world. Of particular interest were the bears, lions, tigers, monkeys, orangutans and rhinos.

They have set out the zoo really well but set aside a whole day as that will give you plenty of time to sit and listen to the shows and explanations in the amphitheatres and bowls, pity we only had 4 hours. It was good to see the Australian plants, trees, birds, koalas and kangaroos on display (home sick).

It was nearly dark at closing time as we caught the number 7 bus to Downtown San Diego for \$1.75 and able to use the same ticket for the next 2 hours (if we need to) to catch the trolley from Downtown to Old Town for a short walk to our hotel. This would have to be one of the most efficient and affordable transportation systems I have ever seen or used and is a totally integrated ticket that relies on the honesty of the people to purchase tickets from vending machines at all the stops because the trolley does not have ticket inspectors, only the driver.

San Diego is a beautiful city and you would need at least 5 days to visit the museums, galleries, parks, attractions and beaches to really appreciate everything the city has to offer. We both agree we could live, work, play and relax here.