

USA Travel Diary - Dylan Vignola

First stop - New York

I woke up on the Tuesday morning feeling excited for my trip, but couldn't help notice a slight tingling in my throat. I had had a fever and headache the previous day so I was slightly concerned but I took some meds and put it aside, as I was too excited for my trip and had some last minute packing to do. After saying my goodbyes I made my way up to Manchester Airport to catch my first flight to London. By the time I got to Manchester airport that afternoon the tingling had turned into a full scale sore throat and I was a bit worried about being uncomfortable on the flight. I took some more meds and got on my flight to Heathrow. The 35 minute flight was quite pleasant. It felt as if we had just taken off when suddenly we were landing in London. With only an hour to change in Heathrow I made my way to my gate for my New York flight. At this point I could feel the excitement building. All I had to do was get through the 8 hour flight. The flight itself was pleasant, but my throat was dry and irritable the entire way. Luckily I was on an aisle seat, something I wasn't initially happy about, but turned out to be a blessing, as I was constantly getting up to go ask for water from the flight attendants. Finally after many films and a glass of wine, the Captain announced we had started our descent into New York. When we got on the ground I made my way through the airport, I think the adrenaline and excitement were keeping me up because for me it was essentially 2.30 am even though it was in fact only 9.30pm local time. I finally managed to stumble my way to the airtrain at JFK and onto the subway, but only after stopping a few locals and asking for help. Even though it was almost 11pm local, and I was completely exhausted, I couldn't resist making a stopover in Times Square on my way to the hostel. I stepped out of the subway station and was instantly mesmerised by all the sights, lights, colours, and sounds. I was in New York City! With my backpack on my back and my day bag on my front I felt like such a tourist but I didn't care, I was too happy to be here. However, after only a few minutes my exhaustion caught up with me and so I went back to the subway station and made my way to the hostel in the Upper West side. After checking in I, reluctantly, had a quick shower and went to sleep. I fell asleep almost instantly.



Two hours later I woke up with an incredibly dry and painful throat. I continued to wake up every two hours, drinking water to ease the throat. I woke up again at 7.30 and didn't get back to sleep. By the time 9am rolled around I realised that any more sleep wasn't going to be possible so I reluctantly stumbled out of bed. This was not the ideal start to my holiday. After my shower, feeling very hungry I made my way downstairs to the breakfast bar and ordered a panini. I was mightily surprised at the portion sizes as I could barely finish it despite being ravenous, and it took over an hour to drink my medium coffee. After hanging around a bit I got my stuff and made my way into the city. My first stop was Times Square, again. It seemed very different in the day time, not nearly as exciting, but still a great sight. From there I made my way through the city just walking around

and exploring. I visited the Grand Central Terminal, and then made my way to Madison Square Park, and saw the flatiron building. Spotting the Chrysler and Empire State buildings along the way. I had planned to go to the top of the Rockefeller building the next day so I could get a good view of them then. I spent the rest of the afternoon exploring a bit more and by the time 6pm rolled around I thought it best to go back to the hostel. I got back and lay down on my bed to relax for an hour or so, before I knew it I was fast asleep.

I woke up the next morning at 6am, clearly I needed the sleep! I decided to get out of bed early this morning and get up to the top of the Rockefeller Centre as early as possible to avoid the crowds. Luckily my throat was hurting a lot less this morning, but I still took my meds and hoped that it would clear up over the next few days. I got to the Rockefeller Centre just after opening at about 8.15 and made my way to the top. I stepped out onto the viewing platform and was utterly astounded! This was the view I had been dreaming of, this is the view I had been waiting to see, this was New York. I spent about an hour on the viewing platform just taking in the views, breathless. The noise from the city was rising up combining into a constant roar at the top. Finally I left the top and made my way downtown. I walked through Little Italy, which was a little disappointing for me, it was the same as the rest of New York, but people were speaking Italian. Nonetheless I carried on and made my way into Chinatown which was what I was expecting, from street markets to decorations it felt like Chinatown. I then made my way to City Hall where I got onto the Brooklyn Bridge Promenade and walked over Brooklyn Bridge, which offered amazing views of New York and of course the Bridge itself. When I got to Brooklyn I made my way down to Main Street Park, under Manhattan Bridge to get a view of Brooklyn Bridge, I had planned to explore Brooklyn on another day. I was not disappointed, the view was phenomenal with Manhattan in the background. I then mooched around a bit on the waterfront getting in more views of the bridge and Manhattan before making my way back to Manhattan by walking over Manhattan Bridge this time.





I set out the next morning to make my way over to New Jersey to go and stay with Mrs Matthews and her family in the town of Clifton. The bus ride was only about an hour or so,

and it offered magnificent views of the west side of Manhattan coming out of the Lincoln Tunnel. I arrived at the house feeling slightly nervous and not sure what to expect. I was greeted by Mrs Matthews and her three sons, and before long I was feeling relaxed, they made me feel very welcome. After I had settled in, I spent the afternoon getting to know the Matthews' before getting an early night feeling rather tired.

I woke up the next morning feeling much better. Over breakfast I met Rachel's husband John, he was a lovely man, but we didn't chat long as I was heading out back into Manhattan to do some more exploring. I arrived at the bus terminal in Manhattan and conveniently it was right near the northern entrance to the Highline. It was interesting walking along the highline and seeing the history of it and how it was used to transport freight up and down the west side of Manhattan. It was also a pleasant walk in and of itself, and a different way to see Manhattan. The rest of the day was fairly uneventful. I wandered over to Greenwich Village, went and saw the "Friends Apartment" and explored lower Manhattan.

The next day the Matthews' had organised a barbeque and the weather was absolutely perfect for it. They had invited some of their friends around and we spent the day outside by the swimming pool having a nice day in the pool with good food. The friends had brought their kids over and the kids and I had a water balloon fight in the garden. This was one of the highlights of the trip, amongst others.

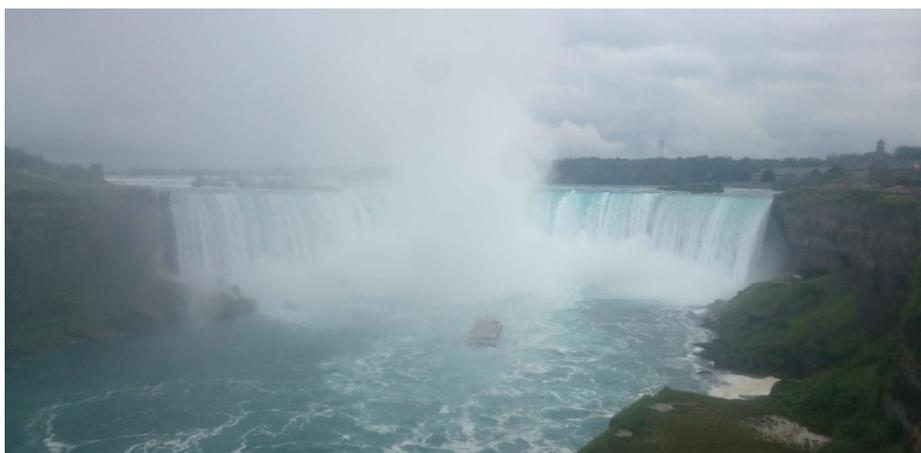
The next day was my last full day with the Matthews'. I didn't do much in the morning but that evening we went out to dinner at an American Diner. It was a rather interesting and exciting experience for me with lots of food on offer, that I could barely finish. After dinner John was taking me for a scenic flight over Manhattan as he had his pilots licence and they owned an airplane. It was an amazing experience that offered views of Manhattan that are just out of this world, despite the fact that it was incredibly foggy. Unfortunately Trump was in New York so the airspace was highly restricted which meant that John couldn't let me take hold of the controls. Nonetheless it was still an amazing experience.



I would like to thank John and Rachel, and their kids for the amazing time I had with them in New Jersey and for their great hospitality. They made it a great start to this holiday.

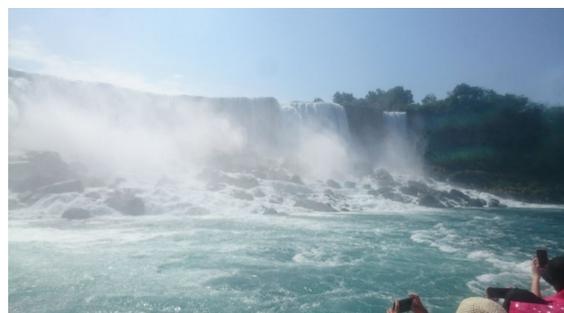
Niagara Falls

The next day I left the house early to catch my 1pm flight to Buffalo. Next stop, Niagara Falls! After saying goodbye to the Matthews' and thanking them, I set out and trekked across New York to JFK. I arrived in Buffalo, and admittedly I had no idea how to get to Niagara Falls from here. Asking at the information desk at the airport was no help as they suggested the only way to get to Niagara Falls, Ontario was by private shuttle service. After a bit of digging, inquiring, and googling, I figured out I could get a local bus to Downtown Buffalo, then a local bus to Niagara Falls, New York, and then walk across Rainbow bridge and into Canada. After a few hours of travel I finally arrived in Niagara Falls, and found the town to be incredibly tacky! Lots of bright flashing neon signs and cheap tourist traps with people milling about everywhere, I thought this was not a great start but the view of the falls was absolutely amazing. I didn't do much exploring as it was getting late and I had to make my way to my hostel which was slightly out of town. I finally got to my hostel later that night to find I was the only person in my dorm. I was quite tired at this point so I decided to get an early night.



The next day I woke up to find someone had arrived during the night in my dorm. We made introductions, his name was Lino, a German guy in Canada on a working Holiday Visa. We got to chatting that morning and decided to meet up later that evening as there were apparently some fireworks on in the town. Afterwards, I set out to go and explore Niagara Falls. I avoided the town and went straight to the falls lookout points and information centre where I bought a pass for a few of the waterfalls attraction. One was something called “Niagara’s Fury” which was an animated film that showed the history of the falls, followed by a 4D experience of the falls. I found it to be rather uninformative, bit disappointing and more geared towards children. A quick wikipedia search revealed far more information about the history and formation of the falls. Nonetheless it was part of the package so I moved on to the next which was a “Journey behind the falls”. This offered a tour of the tunnels that were constructed behind the waterfalls, originally for mining and turned into a tourist destination. It offered a great view of the falls and a chance to stand behind the falls and “feel the power of the falls”. In reality, standing behind the falls, was just standing at the end of a tunnel with a view of nothing but a grey wall in front of you, and again rather disappointing. However, the history of the tunnels and their purpose was very interesting, and the viewing platform at the base of the falls did offer a great view and was rather impressive. After that it was nearing the end of the day, the next attraction was a walk along the river rapids a couple of miles downstream of the falls which was near my hostel so a perfect end to the day. The only attraction in my package I hadn't done was the boat tour under the falls, but I decided to do that tomorrow. I made my way to where the river rapids tour started. We took a lift down to the bottom of the canyon and came out to a boardwalk that went along the river for about 1 km. It was pretty impressive to walk along these level 6 rapids but I wish the walk had been longer. I saw over on the American side of the canyon was a long hiking trail that went along the entirety of the river and was undoubtedly free, which made me feel rather cheated, but nonetheless I enjoyed watching the amazing power of the river. After getting back to the hostel and I had a quick shower and then went out to go meet Lino for the fireworks. We had a great evening sitting by the falls chatting getting to know each other, we had a lot in common and got on well. Eventually we went back to the hostel and went to sleep.

The next day I was going to Toronto at some point, but I still had to go and do the river tour of the falls. Lino decided to get the same package as I had, and so we decided that we would go and do the river tour together before I went off to Toronto. The tour itself was a lot of fun and quite exciting, definitely the best tour of the package and made the package worth it. It was the only tour of the package that I would have been happy to pay for individually. The boat went right up to the bottom of the falls and the spray got us absolutely soaking wet. After the tour I still had a lot of time left before my bus to Toronto, so we decided to up the Skylon Tower. The views from there were absolutely incredible of both the falls and the surrounding area. When we came down from there we said our goodbyes



and decided that we would keep in touch and visit each other when we got back home. I went back to the hostel to get my things, and got on the bus to Toronto. I got to the hostel in Toronto in the early evening. After doing a bit of exploring around the area I went back and got an early night.



Although it may seem like I was mostly disappointed in Niagara Falls, I was only disappointed in the development made to cater for tourists. The falls themselves were absolutely magnificent, it's just a shame about the town. Next time I will stay on the USA side and see how it compares.



Toronto

The next day I set out to explore Toronto as this was my only day in the city as I was leaving early the next morning to fly to British Columbia. I found Toronto to be a great city, lots of interesting architecture and a pleasant city in general. I walked around the downtown for a while before going down to the waterfront on Lake Ontario, where I sat on the docks and watched the airplanes going in and out of Toronto City Airport which is situated on an island just off the shoreline of Downtown. Afterwards I went up to the University of Toronto to have a walk around and explore a bit. Although I didn't officially enquire, I thought I would be happy

living and doing postgraduate study here. After that I did a bit more exploring before heading back to my hostel for the evening. I had planned to get an early night as the next morning I would have to get to the airport very early to catch my flight. I spent the evening figuring out



how to get to the airport, and it was then that I realised that I had to leave the hostel at 3am but the first train to the airport was only at 3.30am. After asking at the desk of alternative travel options I realised that my only options were get the 3.30 train, which technically I would arrive on time, but any delay and I risked missing my flight, or ordering an uber for C\$50. In the end I opted for the uber as the risk of missing my flight was too high.

The rest of the evening, I spent some time relaxing, and with my uber ordered I got an early night so I would be fresh in the morning.

Whistler

The next morning I arose at 4am (with the uber the travel time was significantly shorter) and it was at this moment that I was thankful that I had opted for an uber as the thought of dealing with public transport at this time of the morning was just too much. Before long the driver picked me up at the door of my hostel and dropped me off right in front of the Air Canada



check in area. Next was airport security, and I honestly found the Canadian Airport Security people to be the nicest security, if not people, I had encountered. As I was going through the scanner there was a blip on my chest area so the officer pulled me aside and asked if I was happy to do a pat down, of course I obliged and when he found nothing on my chest he said, "Ah, just your big ol' heart". I was just stunned and instantly found myself blushing and clutching my heart I let out a long "awww" sound as he smiled and turned away. Not quite sure what to do or say I just stumbled away in awe and made my way to the gate with a wide grin on my face. What a great, to an otherwise dreary, start of the day. The flight itself was fine, a lot longer than I expected, I did not realise that Canada was so big! Soon enough, however I arrived in Vancouver, at this point after 5 hours flying and 3 hour time difference it was still only 8am. This was going to be a long day. Luckily however, my Uncle and Aunt (They're technically my 1st cousins once removed but for all intents and purposes they are my uncle and aunt) live in the Vancouver area and they came to fetch me from the airport. They had very kindly offered to drive me up to Whistler. However, we first went for breakfast in Vancouver and they showed me around a little bit. We didn't do too much exploring as I was going to be coming back to stay with the in September for 4 weeks to do my pilot training. After breakfast we headed out of Vancouver and on our way to Whistler. It was only a 2 hour drive

but it was a spectacular drive, the highway isn't called the 'sea to sky highway' for nothing. When we got to Whistler we went to my hostel so I could check in and drop off my stuff before we went and explored and got some lunch. The hostel itself was again amazing, very cabin like, with a very homey feel. I had a feeling I was going to enjoy my time here. After dropping my stuff we went into the main part of town and there was a huge crowd of people. We didn't realise it at the time but I just happened to be in Whistler during the Crankworx Downhill Biking tournament. After lunch and doing a bit more exploring, Rod and Didi dropped me off at my hostel and after saying our goodbyes they went back to Vancouver. That evening I just stayed at the hostel and relaxed, and planned some hikes that I would do over the next few days.

This next week that I spent in Whistler I mostly just spent relaxing at the hostel, going on hikes, and relaxing in the main part of town, so I will break from chronological order and talk about some of the activities I did while here.

Hike to Iceberg Lake

The first hike I did while here was to Iceberg Lake. This was a 13.7km, out and back hike. I set out at around 10am with the expectation to back around 5pm. The first part of the hike was a lot of ascent and soon I found myself walking through the Canadian wilderness. As I walked I would clap loudly every so often to alert any bears in the area of my presence, luckily I did not encounter any. Along the way there were a few lookout points and a few stops along a stream with some waterfalls. It was a very pleasant hike. After a short while I encountered some other people walking on the trail, and we spent most of the hike passing each other, which made me feel a lot more relaxed to know that other people were on the trail if anything were to happen. After about 2.5 hours of walking I reached a large clearing with spectacular views of the mountain. According to my map the lake was just up a hill of stones on the other side of the clearing at the base of the mountain. Within 30 mins I reached the top and was greeted by a spectacular sight of the lake with indeed icebergs floating around in it, having broken off the glacier. I spent about 30min at the lake just resting and enjoying the view before turning around and heading back down. I had eaten my lunch on the way up and had had $\frac{3}{4}$ of my total water supply, so I decided to make a speedy return as I was getting hungry again and was starting to feel tired. I made the return trip in just under 2.5 hours and was back by around 4.30. I made myself a dinner and spent the night resting before getting an early night. Overall a difficult, yet absolutely amazing hike that I would highly recommend to anyone.



Day at Lost Lake



Lost lake is a little lake just outside the main town of Whistler, accessible by car, or a short 30 min hike. It has a nice little grassy area and a beach where lots of people were sunbathing and relaxing and few other beaches dotted around the lake. There were little floating wooden podiums dotted around the lake as well which had people sunbathing on them or people diving into the lake from them. In general a very

summery vibe which was a perfect day out in the hot Whistler sun. I swam to one of the podiums just off "Canine Cove" which was one of the smaller beaches where dogs were allowed. There I sat on the podium and played with some of the dogs swimming around and chatted to the owners. For me this was absolute heaven, an ideal summer holiday! After doing some more swimming and sunbathing it started to get into the late afternoon and started getting a bit colder, so I decided to pack up and go get dinner and a gelato in the main town before going back to the hostel. Another great day in Whistler for me.



The Trainwreck Trail

During my time at the hostel I had met a few people, including two Australian girls. We decided to go on a hike together and we settled on the Trainwreck trail. It was only a short trail, maybe an



hour each way but very interesting. In 1956 a log train was

travelling down the tracks from Whistler, it was going too fast around a corner and derailed and got wedged inside a rock gorge. To clear the tracks the train cars were carried off the tracks and into the forest where they still lie today. A few decades later the area was turned into a bike park and an urban art area where graffiti was allowed to be painted on the boxcars. Since then the bike park has fallen out of use and what remains is a rather amazing yet eerie sight under the cover of the forest. The hike to the trainwreck itself also offered spectacular views overlooking the river. Another hike I would definitely recommend.



The only problem with this part of the trip was the smoke that was hovering in the air due to the wildfires that were engulfing large portions of British Columbia and Alberta made the views of the scenery less than optimum. Despite this though, I had a very relaxing and amazing time in Whistler and now it was time to make my way down to Victoria.

Victoria

The journey was quite long, which involved 3 busses and one ferry, but finally I got to Victoria downtown where I was met by Mr Boudewyn Van Oort and his wife Nancy. I spent the rest of the evening getting to know them, they were both absolutely wonderful with some amazing stories to tell. Soon after dinner I bid them goodnight and went to sleep.

The next morning I met their daughter Catherine, she is a student at the University of Victoria studying Archeology and Anthropology. Over breakfast Mr Van Oort told me some more stories about his life and his time at Univ, including how he coached Stephen Hawking in rowing during his time here. I was so fascinated by his stories I could spend all day listening to them, but eventually we got up to get on with our days, I was heading into downtown Victoria to do some exploring. I just spent the day wandering around, walking along

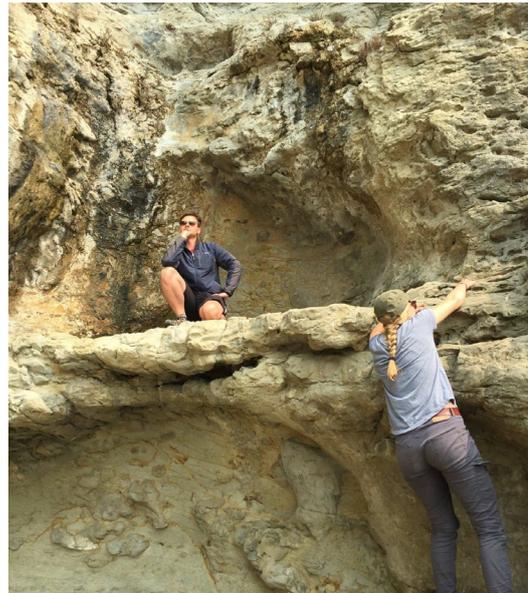


the harbour front, watching the boats and seaplanes from Vancouver. Victoria was quite small but also large enough to have a lot going on, I really enjoyed my time in Victoria, I found it to be a very nice city.



The next day, Catherine had the day off and took me with two of her friends up island to Sombrio Beach and Port Renfrew. Our first stop was Sombrio beach where we went down to the beach and went to a rather secluded waterfall that no one really knew about. Catherine had only learnt of it very recently despite all the years of coming to Sombrio Beach. It was truly a spectacular sight, the water fell into a little cavern through a hole at the top which also allowed the sunlight to pour through the trees and throw a green tinge within the cave. After the cave we

made our way back to the car and drove up to Port Renfrew and Botany Bay, another beach, where there were some rock pools and some other interesting rock features. On the way back we decided to stop for some ice cream. All in all it was an amazing day out, and a great chance to see some of the island.



The next day Mr Van Oort took me to Victoria airport to see an aircraft manufacturer to see about what sort of opportunities they had for graduates, but unfortunately they had guests at the factory and were unable to see me. We also went to the University of Victoria where he tried to line up some meetings with some professors in Engineering there but unfortunately everyone relevant to my field of interest wasn't in that day, but we did have a nice lunch at the university club. I would like to take this time to thank Mr Van Oort in his efforts in organising these meetings. We also made a stop at the observatory which would have offered some nice views of Victoria and the surrounding area if it weren't for the smoke hovering in the air. That afternoon Boudewyn left me at the university and I made my way downtown where I did a bit more exploring and spent the afternoon in Beacon Hill Park.

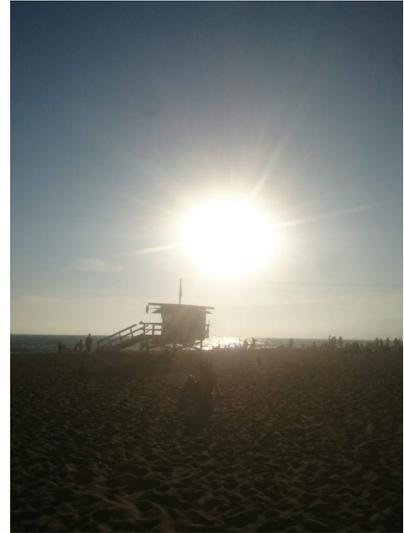
The next day, after another breakfast of amazing stories, Boudewyn drove me to the airport, as I was on my way back the USA, to Los Angeles. I would also just like to take this time to extend a big thank you to Boudewyn, Nancy, and Catherine for their great hospitality and making my stay in Victoria truly wonderful.

Los Angeles

I was flying to Los Angeles from Victoria with a quick stopover in San Francisco, perhaps too quick in fact. Security was a bit slow and I nearly missed my connection. Luckily though, I made it and soon landed at LAX. After making my way to the hostel in Santa Monica it was getting late so I settled into the hostel and went to sleep.

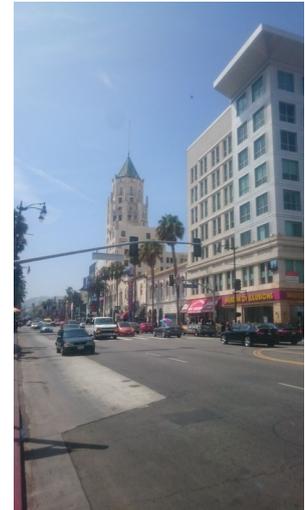


The next day I spent the day on the beach in Santa Monica, tanning, swimming, and wandering around Santa Monica Pier.



It was nice to be in the hot California sun, and nice to be back on a beach. Nothing much else happened that day, I wandered around Santa Monica that evening exploring a bit.

The next day I decided to go into Los Angeles and go and see Hollywood. I got out of the subway stop at Hollywood and my excitement quickly turned to disappointment. The novelty of the stars on the pavement wore off after about 10 seconds, and what was left was a street that was busy, a bit dirty, and not really that impressive. The hollywood sign could be seen in the distance if you squinted and looked from between two buildings.



The Chinese Theatre was more impressive, but was even more crowded, so I decided to keep on walking towards West Hollywood. West Hollywood was nice, lots of cool and interesting bars and cafes, so I spent some time just hanging about before making my way back to the hostel, so far not that impressed with Los Angeles, but I had thought it may be like this. I was expecting Orange County to be much better.

Orange County

The next day I set out early from the hostel to get to Newport Beach in Orange county. A town that is only about 50 miles from Santa Monica and would take 50 minutes in a car, was gonna take me about 5 hours on public transport. I had heard of the American public transport being bad but this was exceptional. Nonetheless I set out from the hostel and made my way to Newport Beach. I got there sometime in the middle of the



afternoon, and found my Airbnb. My host was a lovely guy, from Spain, that was very helpful in giving me advice on what to do etc. I went out for dinner and found a place called Ruby's Diner, an old style American Diner with the classic red and white retro decorations complete with the striped uniforms worn by the staff that I highly recommend, that was right on the end of the Balboa Pier, so the views were amazing. They had a rooftop seating area, so I sat up there and watched the sun hanging low over the ocean eating my meal. Afterwards I walked up Balboa beach and walked along the Newport Harbour Jetty, I got to the end just in time for the sunset, and got some amazing views of the Sun setting over the water. I will say now that the Californian sunset is one of the most beautiful sights I have seen in my life and is worth going to California just for that.



(This camera that I used doesn't do it justice)



(This photo is taken from Santa Monica Beach)

The next day I went up to Newport Beach and walked around the main part of the beach area and went for lunch in a cool bar that my sister had suggested to me, Mutt Lynch's. I then spent the rest of the day just relaxing on the beach enjoying the last of the SoCal sun. Tomorrow I was flying up to San Francisco.

Overall I thought Los Angeles was a very overrated and not as great as its made out to be. The beach and the sunset being the exceptions. However, Newport Beach was amazing and I will definitely return. I think next time I would also like to go down to San Diego and explore a bit more of SoCal.

San Francisco

The next morning I woke up and decided to get an Uber to the airport as it was only 20 min up the road but a bus was going to take an hour and a half, and it was relatively cheap. I was flying from Santa Ana airport up to San Francisco. My boyfriend, Mikey, was coming to meet me in San Francisco and I had booked my flight so that it would arrive at the same time as his flight from London. We were lucky enough to be able to stay with Mikey's aunt, a slightly batty, retired, plastic surgeon called Loren. She took us for lobster and oysters near the airport as a sort of welcome treat before taking us over the Golden Gate Bridge to Sausalito, Marin County, where she lived. We were rather disappointed as we drove over it for the first time because late August and early September is when the fog rolls off the sea and into the bay, and so most of the bridge was obscured in heavy mist. She had a wonderful house made from this strange wooden construction from before the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Built on multiple levels it had at least three, and possibly more, flats.



She had the one on the top floor and we had the middle, along with its own kitchen and dining room.

These next 9 days we did a lot of exploring and enjoying the sights of San Francisco and Marin County so I will again break from chronological order and describe some of the activities we did.

Exploring Downtown San Francisco

We got the ferry from Sausalito and it took us across the bay to downtown San Francisco. It took us right past Alcatraz and gave us some great views of the prison. When we got to the downtown we were feeling hungry and decided to go to Chinatown for some dimsum. Afterwards we



wandered through the rest of Chinatown before getting the metro to Mission District. Mission district is a part of San Francisco just on the south side with some interesting bars, shops, and cafes. From there we wandered up to the Castro District, the gay district of San Francisco. Here we also found some nice bars and cafes as well as some very interesting people walking around. We had a good time spending more than an hour sitting in a bar and people watching, it was very entertaining. Afterwards we met Loren at union square where she ushered us onto a cable car and told us to meet her at the end of the line. The ride was quite fun, going up and down the heavily sloped streets of San Francisco. We ended up in the Fishermans Wharf district where Loren met us and took us to dinner at an amazing Korean restaurant.

Stephen Marley Concert

Loren had got tickets for us to go with her and her ex-boyfriend, whom she was still great friends with, to go and see Stephen Marley, the son of Bob Marley, live in concert at the Greek Theatre in Berkeley. Neither Mikey and I were particularly into Reggae music but the experience itself was reason enough to be excited for it. When we got there it was packed, but there was a great vibe in the air with a great atmosphere. We found some seats at the top



of the amphitheatre with a great view of the crowds and the stage. Despite not previously being a big fan of reggae, both Mikey and I had an amazing time and very much enjoyed the music.

Exploring Downtown Part 2

Still wanting to see more of San Francisco we went to the downtown for a second time. We got the ferry again, and got on a bus up to the Haight district. Here we walked up Haight Street which was full of funky, quirky, weird and wonderful shops.



We had a great time going into weird stores and looking at the funky clothes and accessories in there. Eventually we came up to Golden Gate Park, which is a large park in the middle of San Francisco, much like Central Park but bigger. We walked around the park a bit before going into the Botanical gardens and exploring the different plants and flowers. After spending the afternoon there we made our way up to Ocean beach.

Unfortunately it was overcast so we didn't get to see another sunset over the ocean, and since it was getting cold we didn't spend much time on the beach and soon went home.



Seaplane Tour of the Bay

Another thing that Loren had so kindly booked for us was a 30min seaplane ride around the bay. When we arrived and met the pilot, Loren mentioned to him about my interest in flying and my (limited) previous experience. After being shoved into the copilot seat we were soon airborne. Before long, as I was just enjoying the scenery, the pilot taps me on the shoulder and tells me to take control of the airplane. After being on a 10 day gliding course 4 years ago



I knew what I was doing (just about) but was still very nervous. Regardless it was exhilarating being in control of the plane. The pilot just gave me instructions on where to fly as he was giving the tour of the scenery below us. I don't remember much of what he said as I was more concerned with flying the plane. After a while I did relax and start to take some of the things he was saying in, but still mainly focused on flying. I think it was a sort of relief for him to just sit back and talk about the scenery without needing to fly the plane. After a nice 30 minute flight we returned to the bay to land. Overall it was a great experience for all of us, though there were two other people that were part of the tour but we did not know, and I think they were slightly terrified of a novice flying the plane.

On our last day in San Francisco we went for lunch with Loren before her taking us to the airport. I had booked a flight to Vancouver at a similar time to Mikey's return flight to London, so after thanking Loren for the absolutely amazing time and saying goodbye we headed into the airport. Mikey and I said our goodbyes and I headed to my gate excited to be going to stay with my uncle and aunt, Rod and Didi, in Vancouver and very excited to start my flight training.



Overall San Francisco was an absolutely amazing place that I would go back to anytime. My only concern for San Francisco is the extraordinarily high living costs, but it is definitely an option for later in the future when I am a bit more established.

To conclude this diary, I would first like to thank everyone who made this possible. I would like to thank the Master and the College for making this possible by granting me the scholarship. I would like to thank Mr and Mrs Matthews for their hospitality and kindness in New Jersey, and Mr and Mrs van Oort for opening up their home to me and being kind hosts to me. I would also like to thank their daughter Catherine for being so kind and showing me around. This trip really helped me see what sort of opportunities are available to me and gave me a feel of what it's like in this part of the world. I would definitely consider moving to North America for work and to make a life for myself there one day.