

20090629 – Back To The Good Old USA



Monday – the journey begins. I hope the USA and Obama are ready for the critical onslaught.

Terminal 2 at Manchester has now been refurbished. The only way to the gates is through a security check, free, a cynic would think this is yet another opportunity for merchandising exploitation!

Must say I'm impressed with the free lounge access, helps you cope with the airports. Really makes the credit card seem real good value, especially as Wendy has found the free brandy bottle! Woops there's another empty bottle for recycling. They really do need to get some proper glasses. Never mind at least she's getting her moneys worth.

My 1st encounter with our American cousins is sat next to me, a 25 stone Pilsbury Doughboy. After a major struggle I manage to get the armrest down but no respite he just oozes over the armrest like a rampant jelly. Thankfully after failing to con me into giving up my aisle seat he decides to go elsewhere.

Just 20 minutes into the flight I have my 2nd encounter with an American and already I need a translator. Now I know my spoken French is pretty crap but I did think I could get by with American. Fool! Since when does tomato juice sound like orange juice?

Anyway when we land at Newark and immigration is a breeze, plenty of staff and hardly any queues. For everyone is totally disorientated, the yellow standee line has been replaced by a shorter red standee line. Whatever happened to tradition?

It's good to see that the green immigration cards still have to be filled in despite the ESTA – more bureaucracy! Mind you the computer system had remembered me from our February visit, including my thumb prints and left hand fingers, but for some mysterious reason (bloody programmers probably don't know how to spell right) it hadn't remembered my right hand finger prints so I had to donate them yet again.

Glad to say that both continental flights were good; reasonable leg room; on time; good service.

Well after 24 hours we're here at last so that's over for another month. Travelling just ain't what it used to be. Why don't they sack 50% of those employed in security and spend the funds on fighting terrorism? You'd think the combined might and intellect of the greatest democracy on earth could eliminate a few fanatical ragheads (can you say that these days).

Tuesday – up bright and early ready for a fantastic breakfast. Yes it's waffles with strawberries and topped off with spicy sausages. Who says our American cousins don't appreciate good cuisine? Beats good old Tete de Veau (calf's head).

Then we pick up the car. Times are hard for us pensioners so it's no open top Mustang sports but a compact Suzuki, allegedly a sports model but it's pretty ugly!

Drive into San Francisco to finally go to Alcatraz. But we're gutted there's no availability until Friday. Of course you can always risk the street traders; there are more of these than you can shake a stick at, who claim to have tickets. Anyway we have a very pleasant sunny day around Fishermen's Wharf.

Michael, Michael who? All the TV programmes are obsessed with his death. I'm sick of it, get him buried and move on to some crap US TV – better remove my contact details otherwise I'll incur the wrath of millions of his sickly dotting fans.

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Welcome to JFK the sauna - the airport that is – no sign of Bruce Willis though. But beware of the low flying pigeons, the ceilings only 8ft high so when they come batting down the corridor you have to duck and dive.

First US encounter is stimulating to say the least. Yes we're in the land of the blobbies and there to welcome us is a blobby with the job of directing "US citizens to the right, non US to the left" – in these economic fraught times it's good to see that the US is still creating jobs rather than employing an automated announcement. Mind you what a boring job and I'm sure she was writing down what she had to say!

Forget the ESTA (web sign up for your Visa) they still dish out the Green cards that you have to fill in along with the white customs declaration. Now they want all your fingerprints and thumbs as well as a photo – but I'm dammed if I'll smile for it. Surprised I didn't have to give them a DNA sample – whatever happened to civil rights. Can you believe it! Not only that our cheerful, armed, customs geezer says that there probably going to have to keep the green forms as well the ESTA because they need some means of identifying if you've left the country – it's surreal, you really couldn't make it up. He was amazed that you could go skiing in Salt Lake, Utah – he must have slept through the winter Olympics in Utah – just another example of the low standard of education and general awareness.

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