

Don Gruber's Latest Trip to the USA - May-June 2013

Well, Don has reported in ...

"We are staying for most of the month of June in a serviced apartment in Arlington, Virginia. We are about 1 kilometre from the Arlington National Cemetery and perhaps 5 kilometres across the Potomac River from the White House.

The highlight of the past week was a weekend trip to New York City.

Our bus trip began 8am Saturday when we joined the Vamoose bus for what was a 4 hour trip for a distance of a little over 200 miles. Across Washington DC, up the Baltimore Parkway to Baltimore, Maryland, onto the I95 past Philadelphia to join the New Jersey turnpike into New York. All multilane (from 2 through to 7 lanes each way), all in ok condition, all quite heavy traffic. There was not a lot to see as the roads are landscaped and the late Spring growth in what is an exceptionally wet season means that vision was restricted. But we did see a lot of run down industrial areas and some truly massive port facilities.

We arrived adjacent to New York Penn Station for a 15 block walk down 7th Avenue to Times Square. The blocks are quite short so the walk was not too bad but the crowds were incredible. It was Father's day weekend, and the last weekend of Spring. So tourist everywhere. But the atmosphere is something to experience - everyone out for a look and everyone relaxed.

The challenge was to get Theatre tickets for that night. We had not been able to find affordable tickets online so we went to a couple of theatres to find only the very expensive (\$300 to \$500 each) tickets left. We went to the tourist ticket place in Times Square where they market the left overs but there were no decent shows on offer. So we went to the little man in the corner of the hotel foyer and procured some very good seats for a more sensible price.

We spent the rest of the afternoon wandering around the largest flea market I have seen. It stretched along Broadway from Times Square almost to Central park - perhaps 10 or more blocks of 2 rows of stalls across the entire street. There were lovely little faux antique fob watches, junk jewellery, cosmetics, prints and paintings, leather belts, bags and wallets, food stalls, drink stall and again an incredible atmosphere. And everything very cheap.

On to dinner at a little French restaurant off the major tourist spots. Then to the show - 'Once' - an award winning and very enjoyable musical of Irish love not going well. As we arrived the cast was on stage singing folk songs, with a bar on the stage and the audience participating. Very different. This then merged into the beginning of the Show in the same pub setting.

We did the obligatory wander around Times Square to soak up the atmosphere after the Show. And to eat some truly unhealthy American strawberry cheesecake.

Sunday morning after breakfast we wandered up into Central Park to look around, watched some of a baseball game and the end of what looked like a half marathon footrace. In wandering around we managed to become dis-oriented and so came out at a different corner

to what we thought - it took a while to work things out and get our bearings back. Late check out from the hotel and a walk down 5th Avenue past and through America's shopping strip. FAO Swartz, an upmarket toy shop, the biggest Barnes and Noble bookshop we have seen, mainstream and specialty electronics shops, sports shops, clothes shops and more.

This all had us back at the 2pm Sunday bus back to Washington. Almost 5 hours to get back as the traffic was horrendous.

We had done the tourist things on previous visits - Empire State building, World Trade Centre site, world class museums and so on previously so did not explore the sites this time. The interesting thing was that the new world trade centre building now dominates the skyline as you approach the city, sitting much higher than the surrounding buildings as one of the tallest buildings in the world.”