

Parslows in USA

Our entry to the USA after flying from Zurich was somewhat compromised by a two hour wait to get through passport control. A taxi then dropped us off at our hotel in the dark of night, but the next day we could see the NY cruise terminal from our hotel window.

After a walk around to get our bearings we realised how logically Manhattan is set out and we were ready to board our cruise ship. We also noted a few things we could do on our return to NY including the interesting museum based on the aircraft carrier *Intrepid*, right next to our cruise ship.



The *Insignia* is modest by cruise ship standards, holding only 750 passengers. It was dwarfed by the two other ships docked nearby at the time, both holding several thousand passengers with waterslides and fun fairs on the roof. Our ship offered several different styles of dining, numerous bars, a small casino, a gym, bridge room (one for playing cards as well as the one to steer the ship) and a theatre style venue for evening performances. We found that our interests were served by participating in the daily trivia and occasional music trivia sessions. Most of the passengers were American, but there were two other couples from Australia, some from NZ, a few from various European countries and a few Asian. Most guests were in their 60s and 70s, with very few children on board, so it was quite sedate. Music was provided in various venues by a pianist, a string quartet and a band.

On leaving NY we got our first look at the famous Statue of Liberty, Empire State Building and Coney Island funfair.



On our first four days we selected excursions to see the sights. In Boston we had an interesting tour of Harvard by a final year student named Jake. It was interesting to hear about life in an American college. Harvard students have no say in who they share with in first years dorms. The new first years were all arriving for their first day when we visited, including Obama's oldest daughter.



We continued to learn more about the Titanic as many of those on board were returning to their homes on the East coast of America. The library at Harvard was built with a bequest from a woman whose son was a Harvard graduate and died on the Titanic.

We stopped at Bar Harbour, Maine and Newport, Rhode Island which are both known for being playgrounds of

the rich and famous. In the 1880s this included names like Rockefeller and Vanderbilt.

We toured the Vanderbilt house at Newport (previous picture). It is now a museum and exquisitely ornate inside (deliberately modelled after European Royal Houses). The ground floor had spacious living areas, the first floor had bedrooms and numerous bathrooms, and above that were the servants' quarters. The harbours are full of impressive yachts and ocean going private vessels. Even the "ordinary" houses in these areas are very grand (as pictured).



Our next port, Halifax Canada, also has links to the

Titanic as it was the closest major port to the site of the sinking. All the bodies recovered at sea were taken there and many are buried there. In Halifax we also went to a fort which shows the strong Scottish links. At the Halifax maritime museum we saw yet more artefacts from the Titanic and also learnt of a catastrophic collision between two ships in the harbour in 1916. One of the vessels was a fully loaded munitions ship and the collision destroyed much of the city surrounding the harbour. We also bussed to charming Peggy's Cove, near Halifax that was the site of the crash of Swissair Flight 111 in 1998. Around Halifax does not seem the safest place to live.

We had two full days at sea to rest, read and compete in more trivia before arriving in Bermuda. Bermuda is a small island with no hi-rise because no building can be taller than the church tower and there are no hills, just slight rises. All the houses have white roofs that are used to collect water which is stored in tanks below the houses. This is their only source of water, but as they have a high rainfall it is not a problem.

It was warm and humid in Bermuda and unfortunately our small yacht trip to go snorkelling was cancelled because the boat was being repaired. However we did get to snorkel in Hawaii.



Unfortunately, we had to leave Bermuda ahead of schedule as there was a high pressure cell forming in the area and the captain wanted to change our route back to NY to avoid it. This was just after the devastating hurricane Harvey in Texas, which was SW of our position, so we understood why we took precautions. After being on the go for the last 2 months we enjoyed some quiet time reading, eating, being entertained and we even played two games of scrabble (result, one all). A highlight was Graham winning the final trivia game in a sudden death one-on-one set of questions with our main rivals after the main game ended in a draw. The glory meant more than the prize that was a windcheater with the cruise logo on it.

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Back in NY we moved into our Airbnb apartment on 50th street and 2nd Avenue, just 20 minutes walk from Times Square. It was not flash, but clean, functional and not cramped like the one in Dublin. We used a hop-on-hop-off bus to see things further afield such as the 9/11 memorial, Brooklyn and Harlem. We did a boat trip right around the island of Manhattan where we got closer to the Statue of liberty, all the bridges that link to other islands and the Staten Island Ferry. Apart from that we walked a lot. We took in Central Park, Metropolitan museum, museum of modern art, Guggenheim and the *Intrepid* military museum on an aircraft carrier with a submarine, space

shuttle and a Concorde. We went to the top of the Rockefeller centre to view the city – this is called *top of the rock*. We visited Times Square(photo of the M&M shop to the right), Grand Central Station, Trump tower where we are told some of the family live in the penthouse, classic shops such as Sacks on 5th Avenue, Macy's and Bloomingdales. And no I didn't buy these shoes.



We saw three shows in NY. Graham's first choice was a one man show by Michael Moore, a political satirist. We found plenty of Americans who were embarrassed and annoyed at their president and agreed with Moore as Trump was mercilessly lampooned. We saw *Chicago* because it is a classic show that we had never seen, but it was a bit disappointing. Finally, we saw a musical show called *Bandstand*, based on a true story about a group of return servicemen who formed a band after WW2. The music, costumes and the pace of the show made it well worthwhile. Each time we walked back to our apartment after the show, the streets were busy and many of the shops were still open late at night. It is certainly the city that never sleeps.

In Manhattan, the skyscrapers are clustered where the foundation rock is solid enough to build on. The roads are mostly one-way which makes it easier to cross as a pedestrian, especially when they drive on the wrong side of the road! Despite the traffic congestion and lack of off-street parking many of the cars are large. It is easy to find your way around with the streets being numbered, we just had to learn that there is no 4th avenue and between 5th ave and 3rd ave there is Madison, Park and Lexington – we crossed those streets so many times we soon learnt the order.

It was great to see all the icons that we had seen in films, advertisements and TV. But after a week, we were foot -sore and ready to move on. Certainly wouldn't want to live there, it is a young person's (and- or a rich person's) city. We left our apartment to catch a taxi to the airport at 5.30 am and even then 2nd avenue was busy and we hailed a cab in less than a minute.



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Next flight was NY to Honolulu (on Oahu Island) by United Airlines, then another hour flight to Hilo (pronounced Heelo) on the big island of Hawaii. Hilo is a tropical paradise where it rains about 280 days of the year. We certainly received our share of rain, but it is easy to adapt to and we quickly dried out when it stopped. We hired a Ford Mustang and Graham did an excellent job of driving on the wrong side of the road. He just needed a few prompts that the right was my side and the left was his side. We drove to the Kilauea Caldera, the only active volcano on the island. We saw smoke billowing from the core but it was relatively quiet on the day we were there. We also



saw steam vents, sulphur vents and massive areas of black lava. We drove down to the sea where the lava flow enters, but could not get close without a long hike which we chose not to do. We saw the steam from the molten lava entering the sea. Seeing the lava close up was fascinating. This photo shows how porous it is, there were also several colours showing the variety of minerals present.

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We also had a chance to see some wonderful flowers. Hardly anything is uniquely native to the area as Hawaii is geologically so new. These beautiful birds are from Brazil and the plants came from many different countries around the world. Frangipanis come in a wide variety of colours although the local name for them is plumeria. The arrangement of flowers in the photo was in our hotel foyer. Orchids were growing in the lava field of the active volcano near the sulphur vents, amazingly hardy.



After a day trip where we explored the northern tip of the island we drove to a hotel in Kona in on the opposite, drier side of the island. From here we did a great snorkelling trip in a bay not accessible from land, also where Captain Cook was killed. There were lots of fish, especially schools of lovely bright yellow ones. Next day we did a helicopter flight over the volcano and finally saw molten lava in an active side vent from the main caldera. It was well worth the flight to see the bubbling red hot mass. The photo really does not do it justice. The helicopter then took us along some stunning coast line and through valleys with multiple waterfalls everywhere we looked.



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Hawaiian Airlines then flew us to our final destination of Honolulu where we stayed at Waikiki, a shopping mecca for those who are so inclined. We did a circle tour of the island by bus to see pineapples growing, enjoyed bananas wrapped in filo pastry and deep fried and went to the famous Blue Hawaii beach (photo below). A full day was spent at Pearl Harbour where we saw the sunken remains of the USS Arizona, a submarine, an air museum and the battleship USS Missouri.

On our final day after a bit of shopping, we enjoyed a swim in the famous Waikiki beach and finished the day with dinner and a show. The Rock-a-hula show featured Hula dancing, Elvis and Michael Jackson impersonators and fire dancing. The Elvis had a great voice and really looked the part.

Next stop Melbourne.

