



An (almost) perfect holiday!

It'll be fun I think to tell others all about the great time Shira and I had on our holiday to the good old US of A. Flying to Seattle, after a night's stop-over we embarked on an Alaskan cruise followed by a two day west to east coast train ride from Seattle to Chicago, where we spent a further two nights before flying home. Perfect! Well...almost. Here are some of the (not so) highlights:

Immigration control at Seattle airport gets my prize for the worst ever. Three hours in a queue in a six foot wide, windowless, over-heated corridor got the holiday off to a good start! When we finally got to the front of the queue (exhausted, bedraggled, jet-lagged, hungry, thirsty, not to mention you know what...) the nice Immigration Officer explained in some detail the correct way to surrender my fingerprints to the really tiny fingerprint machine. ('Fingers closed', or was it 'Spread 'em'? I forget). He seemed to have all the time in the world. I felt sorry for the hundred or so people still in the queue behind us. I vowed I'll never, never, ever criticise Gatwick airport again!

We had a pre-paid voucher for our 'Speedy' shuttle bus from the airport to our overnight hotel in downtown Seattle. Excellent forward planning we thought. No need to fight for a taxi after an eleven hour flight. Not so excellent and not so speedy either as it turned out. In fact, not speedy at all, because not there. Because no longer operating from Seattle. Not to worry. We're British! We can cope!! Take these little set-backs in our stride!!! Finally found a taxi. Forty-one dollars gone before we've even left the airport! Thank you very much.

On the ship we had to register our credit card for on-board purchases. Barclaycard's (Bless 'em!) - on-the-ball fraud department wasn't happy we'd left the country without telling them, so no registration for us.



Holidays

by Kevin Sleight

Tried ringing Barclaycard. No answer. Coffee break? Lunch? Holiday??? Just as well we took another card!

Docked the next day at Skagway. Walked a mile and a half against the wind to the 'Jewell Gardens of Skagway'. \$12.50 each to get in. Flowers not so many. Green houses not so green. Plants not so...existent. Total customers = 2 (us!) Well we were told there was a 'limited' amount to see this early in the year. You live and learn. After walking back, I bought myself a Skagway T-shirt. Then we queued for twenty-five minute to get back on the ship in the pouring rain.

Footnote: Jewell is a person, not (definitely not) a misspelled adjective!

Intermission: Rest of the cruise.

Snow. Glaciers. Mountains. Sun. Food. Alcohol. Relaxation. Very nice.

Amtrak train. We were in a so-called 'roomette'. Emphasis on the 'ette'.

I'm thinking 'Trades Description Act' here.

Approximate size – six foot by three foot. (No, I'm not kidding!) Two seats converted into a bed at night with a bunk bed on top. Gap between beds and door about a foot. Instructions to get into the bunk: climb ladder, sit on bunk, lean forward, roll in, attach safety straps (so you don't fall out).

I hate heights, so Shira accepts bunk. She's a trooper! Griddle broke down in Dining Compartment, so no fried eggs. One passenger evacuated by ambulance (Nothing to do with the food). Shira accidentally locked herself in the toilet (eventually escaped!).



Intermission: Saving Grace – amazing views along USA/Canada border and the Mississippi.

Chicago: You wouldn't believe how difficult it is to (a) find and (b) buy a bottle of wine 'to go' in Chicago. Found an off-licence eventually. At the check-out I'm asked for photo ID! Me! Do I look under 21? Tried my Bus Pass but it didn't have the required date of birth. I assured the assistant that I was over 21. Not sure whether I felt flattered or insulted. Fortunately she eventually relented (I think she was coming to the end of her shift and wanted to go home) and let us out with the wine which was wet and red and alcoholic and much appreciated.

Shore front: Elderly gentleman selling papers ('Where you from?', 'Britain', 'Big Issue, Yeh!!') to 'support the homeless', of which I think I'm supposed to assume he's one. Bought a paper. Turned out to be a free Chicago University student paper. Very enterprising of him we thought. Not a bad read though.

Intermission: Chicago is an amazing city.

Chicago airport: Nearly on the plane flying home now. Surely nothing else can go wrong. How about the air-traffic computer going belly-up. Not to worry, air-traffic controllers have 'true-grit', they can cope, just like us British!. They'll simply revert to 'manual mode' says our pilot. Fine, if you don't mind the plane waiting on the runway for two hours until it's our turn to take off. Was that a man with a Stop/Go sign I saw on the runway in front of us?

Brilliant holiday. We wouldn't have missed it for the world!!

Kevin Sleight