

Saturday, Oct. the 1st

Hi everyone,

School has started and that's the definite end of the summer. Right after Anne left and just before Eitan did, my friend Yaffa arrived from Israel to spend here the high holidays. During her stay with me, which just ended tonight, we have passed several thousands miles through many of the beautiful places in the Southwest that were on the top of my list of "must see, and soon".

The first part of the trip was dedicated to "Route Number 1" - the scenic drive along the coast of California. Both of us have already been there, but this time we had 4 long days for the same purpose and we didn't "have" to make the necessary stop in Hearst Castle. This beautiful route between LA and San Francisco offers wonderful views over the ocean and the steep cliffs of the rugged shore. Along this route one may also find the closest places on earth to heaven: Heaven is not in Iraq, between the Prat and the Hidekel, as you may have very wrongly assumed; it's here, in Santa Barbara (or in Carmel, as Yaffa insists). I tried to wonder what could possibly bother the minds of the people who live in the mansions by the sea, spend their time in playing golf, jogging on the beach or watching the deer that walk gently by their window. Indeed, "there's no place like home", when home is by the sea between Monterey and Carmel.

We returned to LA for Yom Kippur and an historic event happened: I wore, for the first time in my life, a jacket and a tie. We even went that afternoon to buy a new white shirt for me. That evening we spent more than an hour, trying to put the tie on... However, I just loved the new look and we paid a visit to all 3 synagogues in the neighborhood. The fast was broken in a pleasant Italian dinner with Eitan who left the next morning.

On Saturday, two weeks ago, we began our 10 day trip in the southwest states. I set the alarm clock for 6am. As planned - we woke up at 6:45, 5 minutes before the taxi driver rang our door bell. At 8:00 we were already in the air, at 9:00 we had breakfast in Las Vegas, at 10:00 we were already cruising in our rented space-shuttle and before noon, after being in California, Nevada and Arizona, we crossed the border into the 4th state for the day - Utah. We spent 6 glorious days in southern Utah. What can I say? If I thought that I saw beauty before, here came Utah and showed me what a real beauty of nature is: striking, overwhelming, breath-taking. We saw all 5 national parks of Utah (the greatest number of national parks in one state in the US) and each one of them is great. On top of that - the scenic drives from one park to another are stunning as well! Within few hours we drove through Jehuda desert, Switzerland, New England (foliage), Patagonia (endless planes and infinite skies) and the face of the moon!!! If I left LA with the blues, a bit sad and melancholic (never mind why; I allow you Eitan to assume that it's because you were gone) - a few hours later I was like a kid who had to stop the car every few minutes, get out to breath the cool air and take half a dozen pictures of the view in front of me.

Our first station was Zion park. There are no words to describe its beauty. It combines both fierce and delicate landscapes, colorful and black-n-white, flora and fauna. The highlight was a trail in a deep canyon river. We walked barefoot in freezing water up to the knees (I had heavy long jeans on), between the high canyon walls for a couple of hours. This trail and the whole park may be described as "most rewarding."

Next - the Bryce Canyon Park. Famous for its "hoodoos" - strange tall pillars carved in the red and white limestone. Very beautiful and unique. In the first day it was cloudy and the rain in the horizon added more drama to the canyon that is extremely dramatic as it is. The next day it was sunny and

totally different. The highlight: going down in between the hoodoos and realizing how big they really are.

Capitol Reef - a park that resembles the High Mountain area in Sinai. However, the mountains and rocks are sharper and more awesome. Like in Sinai, the trails are marked by cairns - small piles of stones ("rujumim" in Arabic). I just loved the place and could spend there days. Only one little road passes through the park and there are very few visitors. We were actually alone there and Yaffa kept saying "I can't believe that we are in America". Highlight: we discovered a 30 meter high rock, shaped like a satellite dish, which returned our voices in a perfect echo.

Canyonlands - a land of vast canyons. All we ate that morning was one pancake in a lonely Cafe Baghdad in the middle of nowhere. Therefore, upon entering the park I asked the ranger if there's a food store inside. He smiled cruelly and replied: "not even a coke machine...". When I asked the nice old lady in the visitor center where's the nearest food, she put away the map of the park and took out the map of the US. Highlight: every mountain looked like a juicy steak and every river like a stream of soup.

Arches - a park full of natural arches and other rock formations. Highlight: while watching the most famous arch in the park, "the delicate arch", we understood where Salvador Dali took his inspiration for some of his pictures.

Mesa Verde, Colorado: A Park on a very high "green table" (mesa verde in Spanish) where many dwellings from the 13th-century were found in the cliffs. This is where the native Americans of the region (called "The Anasazi") lived. I never found archeology fascinating, but those old ruins and their location between heaven and earth just over an abyss, were quite unusual. This place was declared by the United Nations as a "world heritage site". Highlight: none.

After passing through the "Four Corners" (where you pay \$2 for the privilege of standing in the only point in the US where 4 states meet - Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona) we entered The Monument Valley Park that is so famous due to many westerns and other movies. Simply awesome! The whole area is in the territory of the Navajo tribe: they run the park, independently of the national system of parks, they have their own taxes and even their own time (in summer, their time is one hour ahead of the rest of Arizona). Highlight: Paying one of them to ride with his horse to the edge of a cliff and pose for the ultimate western picture with the huge monoliths behind as an impressive scenery.

Next - The Grand Canyon that needs no introductions. Highlight: Sunset and then sunrise over the canyon. Pure and sheer beauty. However, one day is not enough and I hope to return again.

After that we visited the huge Hoover Dam which was built in the 1930s over The Colorado River (that is the river which flows through the Grand Canyon). Unsurprisingly, the guide referred to it as "the 8th wonder of the world" (the Americans tend to stick that annoying title to many things in their country, e.g., The Grand Canyon or The Empire State Building in NY). After hearing how much electricity is produced by the power plant in the dam, we continued to Las Vegas and saw where it's being wasted. I won't say a word about Las Vegas since: (a) One has to see that place in his own eyes in order to believe that such a place really exists; (b) I tend not to write about the bad and disgusting things that America has to offer.

Upon returning to LA I found loads of mail. One of the things was The LA Magazine issue that had the updated list of "125 noteworthy restaurants in LA". I picked "Le Chardonnay" - a Franco-Californian (there is such a thing) restaurant in Hollywood. We had the most expensive dinner of our life, that, gladly, was also one of the best. After kissing the hands of the chef we stepped out and understood

that this is it: time to return back to the routine. Yaffa is in NY, on her way back to Israel, and I have to prepare my class for Monday.

Bye,
Tamir