

Hi everyone,

After a beautiful sunny winter, we have a strange spring. The sky is cloudy and sometimes it even rains (a few drops for a few seconds). In one extremely stormy weekend (in LA terms) I escaped with a friend from Stanford (Ron Karidi) to San Diego. That was a wise choice since San Diego is always sunny and warm and also because that was the weekend of the strong 5.5 (I think) after-shock in LA.

Anyway - San Diego is truly beautiful and charming and I strongly recommend to everyone who ever gets to be in LA to make this short 2.5-hour drive to that pearl on the Mexican border. Apart from spending time wondering in the "gas-lamp quarter", in downtown, along the "embarcadero" (the strip along the beach) and in "La Jolla" (a place north to San Diego where all you can see is the sea, the clean sand, hundreds of tall palm trees, impressive houses and trouble-free people) we spent a whole day in "Sea World". In Sea World, like in Disneyland or Universal studios, one can enjoy the ultimate American experience: The funny shows, the marching bands, the overpriced junk food and the general atmosphere of "is this country great, or what?!". If in Disneyland I felt, at some point, like throwing out - it wasn't the same here. I had a great time, lots of fun, great laughs and I left the place with a huge idiotic smile on my face. A word of advice to the future visitors among you: Do not (I repeat - DO NOT) sit too close to the dolphins or the whales pool .

Pessach was also great. I spent the entire morning calling friends and relatives in Israel, the states and even London. After a good brunch and movie ("Naked Gun, 33 1/3" - still funny) it was time to take a bath, wash my face and behind my ears(!), put on my best clothes and cross the corridor to the Atsmans who invited us for the Seder. It looked as though it's going to be a "ne-fila" but it wasn't. They didn't insist on reading the whole Hagada, the other people were very nice and interesting and I spent a great part of the evening exchanging dirty (and also non-dirty) jokes with the woman who sat beside me and confessed that she used to be JAP (Jewish American Princess). The very next morning, we embarked on a 5 day trip to the Yosemite national park. We were two Israelis (Amnon and I) and three Brazilian math graduate students (Marcus, Marcia and Lucia who came all the way from Toronto where she studies). Although many experts warned us that the Yosemite is still extremely cold in March, we had the best possible weather. Even at night, I could go out of the cabin to the restroom without putting on a "dubon" (but I needed to look out for "dubim"). The sky was blue, the air was clean, the waterfalls were full, raging and roaring, the animals were out (squirrels, foxes, coyotes, raccoons, deers), the flora showed its pretty face and the famous huge rocks and mountains of the Yosemite valley, as well as the giant sequoia trees, were there waiting for our admiration. And on top of that - we were back home on Thursday evening, just in time for The Simpsons and Seinfeld. Who can ask for more?

Yesterday night (Monday), at 11PM, they announced on the TV-news that the Santa Monica freeway ("the busiest freeway in the USA") that suffered a severe damage in the earthquake has just been reopened for the public. That was an amazing surprise! A 30 meter bridge in that freeway simply collapsed in the quake, about 3 miles east to my house. The place looked those days like a most terrifying nightmare (especially at night). The forecast was that it would take not less than 6 months, perhaps even 8 months to repair that damage. However, each time I drove by that open wound in the freeway I saw a great progress. Dozens of people worked there 24 hours a day. It appears that the project was given to a private company (and not something like "Ma-atz") and that company was given a deadline. The contract said that for each day the company finishes the job before that deadline, it will get a bonus of \$200,000! They did their job in less than 3 months (and I guess this is why they insisted on opening the freeway before midnight, just on time for the 11 o'clock news), which is at least 2.5 months before the deadline. The arithmetic is very simple; just multiply and open your mouth in amazement. With such a huge bonus, it is possible that they bribed the state supervisors to

overlook a "hafif" work. We'll just have to wait for another quake or after-shock to check that.
Indeed - "money makes the world go around".

Yom Atsma-ut Same-ach ulehitraot bekarov,
Tamir