



MY LA STORY

First...a moment. To take a deep breath, gather strength and remember that despite some fanatics' best efforts, the world isn't falling apart and that bombings, nuclear testings and bizarre presidential candidates are anomalies in this world. I pray for all the souls – for those whose lives were tragically lost, and for those among us who are still lost in their search for meaning.

So....

I recently spent a great two weeks in Los Angeles. When I say great, I really mean it. I was never excited about LA before. I mentioned in a previous post that when I was growing up there I was dependent on others to drive me around, and that made me feel trapped. So that had a lot to do with it.

It has been three decades since I last officially lived in the City of Angels, and it only makes sense that an enormous amount has changed, of course. Many more people have moved in, neighborhoods have developed for the better and are more aesthetic, more interesting, and, what is really compelling – more bikeable and walkable. And now, there are even subways (gasp, public transport!) to connect some of these boroughs.

LA County is made up of 88 cities, each with its own identity. There is, for example, Silicon Beach (Venice) with its Abbot Kinney street, lined with great design and designer stores, original restaurants and cool cafés, and with corresponding real estate prices which near that of Manhattan. Santa Monica has the promenade, pier and beaches; Beverly Hills has palm trees, mansions and Rodeo Drive; East LA can claim artists and a more creative vibe; Alhambra offers excellent Chinese and other Asian foods; then there's Pasadena, Manhattan Beach, and I could go on and on...

One of my favorite parts of all is Downtown LA. It has developed into this sexy thing. With Grand Central Market, cafés, restaurants, and architectural highlights such as the Broad, the Disney Concert Hall, the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, among others.

Downtown LA now reminds me of Berlin a few years ago, when all you could see were construction cranes. Residences and retail and entertainment centers have sprung up, and construction is far from done... A side note: the architecture company of which my brother-in-law Paul is COO, is currently building what will be the tallest building West of the Mississippi, the Wilshire Grand. They had the Concrete and Structural Topping Out Ceremony on Tuesday, March 8th, while I was in town. Everyone from management to designers to the construction crew got to sign the last steel beam before it was permanently imbedded in the structure. How cool.



When we were growing up in SoCal in the 80s, you wouldn't dream of walking around downtown. You wouldn't even drive through some of the areas, they were that dodgy. Hard to believe I would be raving about it one day.

When I was in Munich, I watched 'City of Angels', the remake of Wim Wender's 'Wings of Desire,' about once a year. I appreciated its depiction of LA because it illustrated the city in a way few other films did: picturesque, with neighborhoods and sceneries I rarely saw. (The character Meg Ryan played even biked to get around.) I also liked it because of the way the music became such an integral, yet unintrusive part of the movie that you didn't really notice it. The LA I saw the last weeks has come closer to that of the movie. And that's really lovely.

The essential elements that differentiate LA from NY, and which then affects all other things, are weather, space and food. Warmer weather, a drier climate, and a lot of sunshine create such amazing flora. On my walks with the dogs, I saw everything from pine trees to cactuses to banana trees – with real bananas hanging on them! All the different plants and trees growing out of the same soil, amazing.

Also, even as it gets more crowded – with millions streaming in from all parts of the world to try their luck – Los Angeles still has more space than metropolises on the East Coast. The city is coping by expanding upwards, which in itself is an interesting thing to see. But, in general, if you already own a house in LA, it means you can have two to four bedrooms as well as front and back gardens. There is more breathing space, which is also what makes driving in LA unavoidable despite public transport.

Even though I really like our very bright and pretty spacious Hoboken apartment, I realized quite quickly how limited space is and how very little green one sees around here here. Out the windows are electricity poles, concrete, steel and brick. Though the different buildings are a big part of what gives our little enclave charm, it also makes it somewhat closed in and claustrophobic.

Back to SoCal. Have I mentioned the FOOD? Boy, do I have to mention the food! I had a discussion once with other members of DS who came from California about just how much better food is over there. Maybe because so much of it grows locally, or at the very least nearby. We're talking about all cuisines – Indonesian, Vietnamese, Japanese, Thai, Korean, organic, vegan, vegan organic, Mexican, Vegan Organic Mexican (a lá Gracias Madre) 'American' food, fusion food. Whatever it is, what you get down there is more authentic, more affordable, and for the most part, also more delicious than what you can normally get in New York or New Jersey. As I write this, my stomach is growling because, well, it's lunch time, and I really, really miss the food. Indonesian fried chicken, cendol and deep-fried fish cake from Simpang Asia, pho from the Vietnamese or pao



from the Brazilian are just some that come to mind. It's worth spending time in SoCal to just eat your way from one establishment to the next.

Now what else went on on the West Coast? Ah yes. Disneyline. My name for the self-proclaimed Happiest Place on Earth. Cuz that's what it was all about. Let's see, there was: 1. a line to get to the parking lot, 2. a line to get on the bus, 3. a line to get your bag checked, 4. a line to buy the tickets, and 5. a line to get into the park. Once inside, we enjoyed 6. the lines to go to the bathrooms, 7. the lines to get snacks, and of course, 8. the lines to get onto the rides, which lasted anywhere from 25 to 75 minutes. (The rides themselves would be over by within a few minutes.) Then, in the evening, there was, 9. a wait to get a table at a restaurant, 10. the line to buy mugs from the store, and 11. the line to get back onto to the bus to get back to the car. And this on a normal Tuesday.

Not to say that I didn't enjoy myself. Loved Hyperspace Mountain, Finding Nemo, the Haunted House and Indiana Jones. Not so sure about Star Tours – the wait was long, and the ride short, and the jerking around and the 3D thing made me a little ill.

What was also good was that you were either standing or walking almost the whole day, and that's healthy. My step count was close to 18,000, and because we were outdoors, I got me some Vitamin D. People watching was also fascinating to no end. What they had on, who they were with. There were a lot of Mickey and Minnie Mouse ears worn – who knew? And, now that Star Wars belong to Disney, also a lot of dudes and dudettes with Star Wars t-shirts. We ran into Winnie the Pooh, Eeyore and Tiger, AND Storm Troopers in the same park. Where else would you get that chance?

Am gonna side track a little, but will get back to the point. So I've gained at least a kilo (2.2 pounds) since I moved here because Whole Foods and other gluten and dairy free food providers have made it easy for me to consume cakes, donuts, pita breads, bagels, pizzas (ie sugars and starches) and the like. Now a kilo is a big deal because my weight has been constant for the last 12 years or so. I was feeling a bit apprehensive about how my future self would look like. Roly-poly Pinky? Disneyland was enlightening in this regard. Compared to the average American walking down Main Street, I was very healthy indeed. I would even be pegged borderline anorexic. Imagine that! But it also served as a warning. If I don't watch what I eat...

LA and NY/NJ, and I'm assuming SF and Seattle and other coastal towns have their own standards of what is normal compared to the rest of the nation. According to my sister who is well-versed in the fashion industry, the average size for an American woman is 16. 16? Wow. I just need to move, exercise and reduce my intake of donuts, cakes, and cookies®, and I should be fine. Yes, these are privileged first world problems, I am well aware.



Back to Disneyland, would I recommend a trek out there? Hmm. Yes, if you've never been. But be prepared to deal with the masses. Start early, wear comfortable walking shoes, layer your clothes, and bring lots of water with you! and wear a backpack for comfort. And use the Fast Track passes as much as you can. If you start really early and end really late, you can probably cover both Disneyland and California Adventure Parks in one go. Also, budget for it. Per person per day in Disneyland alone is easily \$175. If you eat in one of the better restaurants, and if you buy t-shirts and the like, that edges things closer to \$250 – \$300. I look at the families with four children and wonder how they do it. A day at the beach compared to a day at Disney...

Ok. I see that it's been one loong post, so I will wind down.

After this trip, I decided I have to visit Southern California more often while we're located here. Because hey, it is one of my homes, and my sister and cousins, aunts, and friends live there. I actually ran out of time to visit people, fancy that! Also, I left in such haste in 1997 and it just feels like I finally made my peace with all of that. There are many many stories from that chapter of my life, which one day I will write about. I'm thinking I need to do a photo project about LA one day.... Speaking of, below some pics from the trip.

Alright y'all. Thanks for reading! Hope all is well with you.