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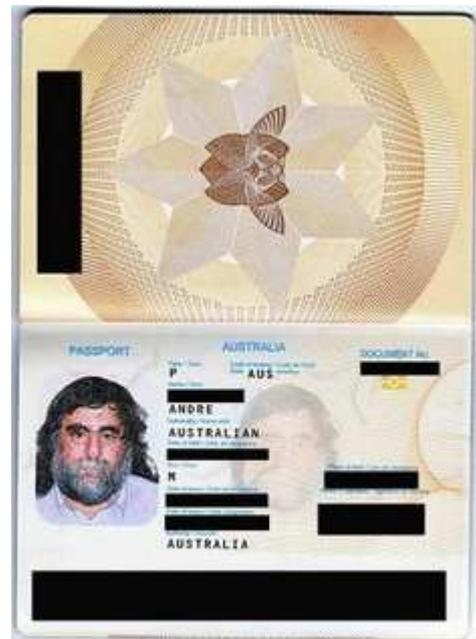
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SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2008

### SIGNED, SEALED & DELIVERED



They gave me tetanus, yellow fever, typhoid, polio and hepatitis - but I survived



I think all of the drugs had an effect which is really obvious in my passport photo



Sharon, however, looks much better in her photo

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2008

## NOT MANY SLEEPS LEFT



Well - all of the preparations are now almost completed - should see the great new vivid purple luggage (no chance of missing this one on the airport carousel)

Innoculations, passports, security checks, flight changes (6 so far - all by only five minutes or so), packing - I feel like I've been on a trip already

Got to go now - need to mow the lawn before I leave

Stay tuned

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WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2008

## MONEY, MONEY MONEY - OR MORE ACCURATELY - THE LACK OF IT



Well, today I took a break from tidying up my room (see picture to understand how big a job this is) and finally bit the bullet and bought some American dollars and Traveller Cheques - why oh why didn't I do this three months ago when there was almost parity between the Aussie and the US dollars - I guess my career as an International Money Trader is over before it even began :) :)

PS: American dollars look funny

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2008

## THE LAST SUPPER



It is now the night before - the packing is done, the tidying up completed and documents checked.

All that is left is sleeping and waiting for the next day when the trip proper begins.

Watch out LA - Andre is coming for his Mickey Mouse ears.



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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2008

## THE PLANE, THE PLANE

Here is my plane being prepared as I and three hundred and fifty or so other people wait in the lounge to board.

My flight was changed at the last minute to go directly from Melbourne to LA a 14 hour trip thus cutting 7 hours off the original flight which was scheduled to go through Auckland.

My luggage came in just under the allowed weight which surprised me as I thought it was a lot lighter - must be all the high tech equipment



SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2008

## HOLLYWOOD, OH HOLLYWOOD

Got into LA at 7.30am - got into trouble with customs over bananas - found a place to stay and then crashed



out for a couple of hours. When I woke up I decided to go to Hollywood (free shuttle to the bus stop and then only \$5US for all day ticket to any public transport anywhere). Great fun riding out on the bus and checking out the sites. Got to Hollywood and was overwhelmed by the commercialism. Every section of Hollywood Boulevard was taken up with either someone dressed as a movie character, someone trying to sell you souvenirs or someone trying to sell you CDs of them and their band. Took lots of pictures

of hand and foot prints at Grauman's Chinese restaurant). Came back on public transport, sort of got a bit lost, had fun trying to find my way back (these policemen were trying to work out the best way for me to get back to where I was staying - they all disagreed with each other). Will sleep well tonight

.....  
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2008

## WHAT A BEACH OF A DAY

Went to Santa Monica beach which is like a big fun fair. A few interesting artists, lots of rides and lots of amusement gaming machines. There are huge fires in California at the moment and there is a lot of smoke in the air. Cars are covered in ash and the sun is a constant orange. Fire trucks are racing through the streets all of the time and Arnie has likened the fires to Armageddon with one of the hardest hit areas being the celebrity enclave of Montecito near Santa Barbara. The beach was nice but nowhere near the clean, crisp beaches we have in Australia - but the natives seem to love it and it is a big tourist attraction. Finally, got given free tickets to go to a taping of the Late Late Show - not sure if I'll go.



MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2008

## TWISTIN' BY THE POOL



Not much action today - mainly spent time sitting around the pool, talking to people (a lot of Irish travellers at the hostel), playing a few games of pool, listening to some great music on the jukebox and playing a few arcade machine games - life can get tough sometimes :)

Went for a one and a half hour walk around the neighbourhood looking for a supermarket/milkbar but no luck until the very end when I found one literally opposite the hostel slightly concealed in a laneway. Bought some bread, cheese and milk - really great to have fresh food (tomorrow - some fresh fruit for a real treat).

.....

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2008

## OLD MACDONALD HAD A FARM.....



Saw the Farmers Market (also known as The Grove) today. Had my first bit of fresh fruit since I've been in USA - it was fantastic. This is an interesting place that is a combination of a food market, an arts precinct and a city shopping centre. Lots of specialty/niche shops - found one selling original Keith Richard paintings for only \$2800US - I would have bought one but the postage home would have cost too much :) Had to go through Hollywood to get to the Market and on the way back got to see Hollywood at night. Lots of

lights, lots of bustle and many huge queues to get into theatres and cinemas. A good place to visit but I wouldn't want to live there.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2008

## THE TROUBLE WITH TRIBBLES....

Today I had the first glitch of the trip - went to the airport to try to change my flight to South America only to find that Avianca airlines did not have me booked in at all. A couple of calls to Qantas, STA in Australia and Sharon finally got it sorted out (after five hours) and now I am leaving on the 25th November (thanks heaps Sharon - the angel of mercy). This will give me time to do a couple of things here in the USA including going to Vegas for an overnight visit - so it all turned out OK. Needless to say not much new today just "hanging around" the airport and the hostel getting everything sorted. Tomorrow - Disneyland



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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2008

## VENICE BEACH IS POPPIN'

Went down to Venice Beach which has the outdoor gym made famous by Arnie. I got a lift from two Aussies who had rented a car and were going down to buy presents for their families. Its reminded me a lot of St. Kilda with lots of stalls selling everything you could imagine - books, t-shirts, tattoos, clothes, psychic readings, drug paraphernalia and food - lots of food). Must be getting used to the bus system as was able to catch buses back without any problems. Walked around for about four hours before my legs said enough - its time to get back to the hostel and give us a rest. In the words of the Brian Wilson song "Venice Beach":

*Venice Beach is poppin'  
Like live shrimp dropped on a hot wok  
Hucksters, hustlers and hawkers  
Set up their boardwalk shops  
Home for all the homeless, hopeless, well heeled, and  
deranged  
Still, nothing here seems out of place or strange.  
There's an old smudge of a Beatnik by the bay  
Lookin' like a dog who's had his day  
Like a dream, he drifts away  
He'd like to go out on the Pier to hear the reedy carouse  
It's got a melody that sets you free, and says  
Let's sit a spell, just to hear the heartbeat in L.A.*



FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2008

## POOL BY THE POOL

Not much happening today just a bit of "house work". Did some clothes washing, checked out the barber and organized a few things to go to Vegas. Still need to make a final decision about whether to hire a car or take a greyhound bus. Looked at this site called Craig's list which provides a linkage for people who want to share things - looked for share rides to Vegas but nothing was quite what I wanted (just missed out on a ride in a BMW and one in a Porsche).



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MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2008

## VIVA LAS VEGAS

Spent two days in Las Vegas and came out ahead by one dollar after playing poker at Caesar's Palace. Las Vegas is completely different at night than it is in the day and, as James my travel companion for this trip said, during the day it looks like a movie star without its make up on. Bright, moving shining lights are what defines Vegas and if you don't like gambling and sex there is really nothing else to do. We caught the Greyhound bus



up and back from Los Angeles and got ripped off by the taxi drive who took us from the Greyhound station to the motel room. Got a chance to look at both the new and old Vegas districts and took the Deuce bus for a tour, especially around the south side which we were told not to hang around under any circumstances. Saw lots of wedding chapels and thousands of gambling places, some a lot more sleazy than others. The big theme casinos are gigantic in size and have to be seen to be believed. These casinos each had more slot machines in them that I think probably exist in the whole of Victoria (maybe a slight exaggeration but not by a lot). Came back extremely tired after only three hours sleep. On the way back, while waiting for the Greyhound bus we got to be extras in a film being shot called Rough Hustle (which is going to be the sequel to Hustle and Flow) - watch out for it at your local cinema.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2008

## M...I...C.....K.E.Y M.O.U.S.E.

Finally got to Disneyland - wow what a place. Six of us went together and we left at 9am and got back at 10.45m. Talk about massive - we saw both Disneyland and the California Adventure Park which are right next to each other. There's nothing like revisiting your childhood - Adventureland, Frontierland Fantasyland, Tomorrowland - they were all there (plus many others). I learnt to draw Disney characters and although my Tigger was OK (if I



say so myself) it was nothing compared to what all the 5 and 6 year olds did. I think, on the whole, I was the oldest kid there and had a ball checking out Mickey and his friends including Goofy, Pluto, Pinocchio, Davy Crockett, Toad, Peter Pan, Dumbo, Alice in Wonderland, Donald, Chip & Dale, Snow White and Minnie just to mention a few. Lots of rides (many of which I didn't go on) and lots and lots and lots to see. Had a ball and the service was exceedingly good and friendly. The place was so clean that it was amazing. It was all well worth the entrance fee which paid for everything except food (which was a little on the expensive side - no real surprises there). Will sleep extremely well tonight. PS: According to the Disney oracle the Disney character I am most like is Jafar from Aladdin

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WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2008

## FAREWELL LA, HELLO LIMA

Finally got out of LA today and started heading towards Lima. This post is being written from the Bogota airport in Colombia where I have a five hour layover. Am so tired after a eleven hour flight (three hours before the flight at the airport, then a two hour delay and then six hours in the air to get here). This is the first time on this trip that I have come up against the majority of people not speaking



English. Hand signs and charades are the order of the day. I was able to buy some food and drink with US dollars (which was very fortunate as I had no Colombian pesos at all). Also lucky to find a useable Internet connection in the airport. I have a couple of leads of places to stay in Lima and have had a bit of advice/input from some of the travellers back at the hostel in Los Angeles. Looking forward to this leg almost as much as I am looking forward to getting some sleep in a bed - any bed

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2008

## HOLA MIRAFLORES - AQUÍ ESTOY

Landed in Miraflores last night, about 6.50pm local time, and have just now finally woke up from a deep, deep sleep at about 12noon. The location I am staying at (the Eurobackpackers Hostel) is pretty good and is close to everything - food, banks, the beach etc. Went for a walk and arrived at the beach after a couple of minutes. It looks beautiful but the sky



was a little overcast. Had my first "proper" meal for ages - it was really, really delicious and only 11 Soles (I'll let you work that out in \$AUS). Will spend the rest of today sightseeing and planning the next leg of my trip. It is amazing being in a place where literally almost no-one speaks your language, and if they do, it is usually in a limited and broken form. It gives me a whole new appreciation of what many of the people arriving in Australia face in terms of the language barrier and making sure that they are not being ripped off.

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FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2008

## GOLD FEVER

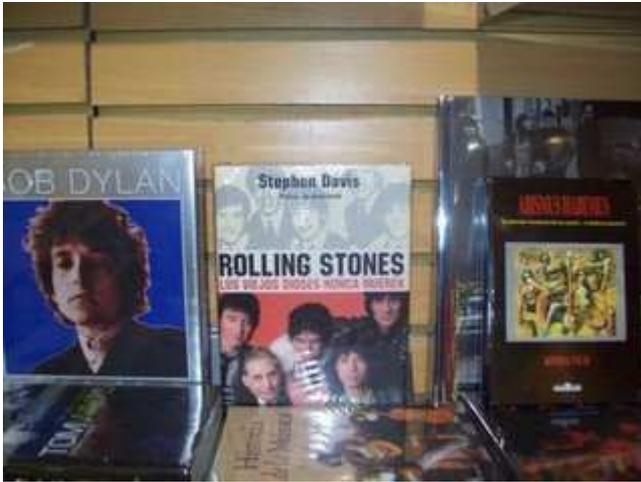


Went to the Peruvian Gold Museum today and learnt much about the significance of gold in the Inca culture and the spiritual meaning it held for them in direct contrast to the material import placed on gold by the Spanish. Talk about two cultures not understanding each other. Had a longer look around Miraflores and found a supermarket - fresh fruit, fresh baked rolls and sandwich fixings - what a joy. Went back to the

hostel and shared my rolls with some of the staff who all seemed to enjoy the fresh food as well. Started planning my trip to Machu Picchu but lost the Internet in the afternoon (server error - some things are constant everywhere in the world). The staff here are fantastic and gave me a lot of advice - will need to make some decisions as not everything can be covered in the time I have. Am considering a trip to Iquitos, in the heart of the Amazon (can only fly in and out) to do a retreat with some Shaman - need to work out the details still but it does sound promising.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2008

## AROUND TOWN



Spent more time looking around the town today - a very interesting mix of new and old architecture. Lots of street vendors and small convenience shops all over the place. Also, there are a huge number of public phones and they are pretty well always being used. In addition there is an Internet shop with international calling facilities on almost every corner. I found a number of bookshops which all had really large music sections - it was strange seeing works on famous artists in

Spanish. The traffic is amazing and all of the buses have spruikers hanging from the doorways urging people to use them. There seems to be great competition with taxis which are just everywhere and which follow you along the kerb touting for your business. Am beginning to firm up travel plans to Machu Picchu and Iquitos. This partly occurred when a poster, due to a gust of wind, fell down on top of me. When I went to replace it I realized that it had some travel options to these places and I have used some of these in my planning - I like to think of this as fate lending a helping hand - hope I'm right.

.....

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2008

## A DAY AT THE MOVIES

Went to San Miguel today by taxi - what a ride - better than any roller coaster. I was sure that we were going to crash at least ten times in the 35 minute trip. The taxi fare only cost \$1.50AUS and we saw a movie (in English with Spanish subtitles) for \$1.50AUS. On the way saw locals preparing a large floral tribute for a religious festival/parade. It is Sunday here and there was a big marathon being run along the main road so the traffic was even more chaotic with much of the road being blocked off. Met a Canadian who was able to provide a lot of good, first hand advice and plans for Machu Picchu trip are now starting to firm quite significantly.



MONDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2008

## HANGING LOOSE

Hung around today preparing for my departure to Cusco tomorrow. Booked a bus trip, which will take 20 hours to go from Miraflores to Cusco. Was lucky to get an upstairs front seat which allows for panoramic views. Was also very lucky to have Chris the Canadian provide a lot of invaluable advice and we will be travelling together. Planning to go to Machu Picchu from Cusco and then will go to La Paz in Bolivia. Had my washing done - it was brilliant - they do not have the sort of laundromats we are used to - instead you drop off the washing and they wash, dry and fold it for you and charge by the kg.



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## ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Took the bus trip from Miraflores to Cusco yesterday and the day before - it was the ride from hell. What was supposed to be a 22 hour trip took 30 hours. Firstly, it left an hour late, then we had to detour because protesters were blocking the main roads, then the driver hit a rock and broke the axle. We had to wait a few hours for a replacement bus - basically in the middle of nowhere. At one stage the driver left and had to return because he left some people behind (Chris included). I also got a bad stomach ache from something I ate and I broke a tooth which definitely meant that this was not the best day



of my life. The scenery was spectacular and it was amazing driving through the mountains. We saw lots of villages and many flocks of llama and sheep. It took me a little while to acclimatize to the high altitude (was very light headed when we got off for one of the bus stops) but I think I'm alright now. Cusco looks really interesting and will plan my trip to Machu Picchu and a few other places while I am getting orientated.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2008

## A VIEW TO KILL FOR

It's been a few days since I posted a blog and that is partly due to the hostel not having Internet access and having to use an Internet cafe. The view from the hostel is spectacular as can be seen by the picture. My stay in Cusco is going to be a bit longer than originally planned as there was a complication at the dentist with another tooth being broken. Due to public holidays and a couple of other factors I will be around for another week. I have been using my time to go on



tours, go to the markets (where you can buy whole series of TV shows on DVD for about \$7AUS - not that I would do anything illegal like that), hanging around food shops (there are hundreds of them), playing poker (not ahead yet) and hanging around the Internet cafe (using Skype to ring home). As an example of the cosmopolitan nature of Cusco I had a spaghetti meal in a Mexican restaurant owned by a German and which was prepared by an Israeli chef - the food was great and plentiful. Lots of churches to see and will do some day trips as well before heading off to Machu Picchu. In Cusco you go everywhere by taxi as any trip from any point to any place costs 3 Soles (\$1.50AUS) and the chaotic traffic beats any carnival ride.

.....

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2008

## ANDRE THE PERUVIAN

Looked in a lot of shops today and found an outfit which suits me well - not. As a Peruvian I think I make a good Australian. Found a place called The Real McCoy that serves everything British. Had porridge for breakfast with fruit and watched an English soccer match on the TV while reading the Guardian newspaper. Later on in the day had apple crumble with custard - your standard Peruvian meal. Today was a public holiday in Peru (Immaculate Conception) and there were parades, music and firecrackers - quite a sight. I bought some headphones at the market yesterday and today set up my computer to use Skype which offers phone calls to Australia for \$0.027 per minute. Tomorrow I hope to finalize my plans for Machu Picchu.



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2008

## THE HUSTLER?

Spent some time playing poker with a group of people from various places around the world - notice the small amount of chips in front of me - I did not end up a winner. It rained for the first time on my trip and it was pretty heavy so not much walking around today. Chris and I split up last night with him going on to La Paz in Bolivia to enter a poker tournament. I still have a few days in Cusco until my dental work is finished. Checking out the post office to see how much it costs to send things home because there are a few souvenirs that I like but don't want to carry around for 6 months or so.



.....

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2008

## A CITY IN RUINS



Went on a tour of the city of Cusco and nearby ruins which included visits to the Plaza de Armas (which was the centre of Inca Cusco ), the Cathedral (which was started in 1550 and finished 100 years later), Qoricancha (Inca Temple of the Sun situated in the church of Santo Domingo which was built on the walls of the temple in the 17th Century) and the ruins of Sacsayhuaman (Inca fortress overlooking the city of Cusco), Qenko (an example of Incan "Rock Worship"), Puka Pukara (an Incan fortress/posthouse) and Tambomachay (Incan baths used for ritual bathing). The ruins were at significantly high altitudes (11,000ft/3,400m) and I swear that the whole of Cusco and the surrounding ruins consist of stairs which only lead up.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2008

## THE TOOTH, THE WHOLE TOOTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TOOTH



Finally, my dental work is complete and I can move on from Cusco. You haven't lived until you have dental work done by someone who doesn't speak your language and the only way to communicate is using Yahoo's Babel Fish translation service. It's really weird typing in questions and answers and then trying to work out the answers provided by literal translations. I can now make the arrangements for the next part of my trip and am organizing travel to Machu Picchu, Puerto Maldonado (in the jungle near the Brazil &

Bolivian borders), Copacabana (where I will probably spend Christmas), La Paz (where I will probably spend new Years) and then Iquitos (to meet the Amazon river).

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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2008

## TRAVEL INSURANCE - DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT

Unfortunately I have ended up in a Cusco hospital with a touch of pneumonia. Nothing major - but I am getting intravenous antibiotics to clear it up - thank god for travel insurance. The hospital room is enormous with a lounge suite, an extra bed for visitors, an enormous TV and a view to kill for - I am on a floor reserved for tourists. The doctors and nurses have been great and extremely thorough. I should be out of here in a couple of days but it may change my travel plans slightly as I may have to avoid higher altitudes for a while, particularly as I am not totally acclimatized yet.



*Team Andre at the Clinica San Borja*

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2008

## TAKING A BREATHER



Recovery is progressing slowly but steadily with the main treatment being intravenous antibiotics and regular sessions with a ventilator to clear the infection. Between these times I have had an opportunity to walk around the hospital region and talk to the local people. There is a huge soccer stadium behind the hospital that is always full of people attending some sort of sporting event. I bought a pizza one night and only ate part of it - the cheese they use (in abundance) was not to my liking. The people working in the hostel I am staying at

dropped in today to see how I was doing and whether I needed anything. They had rung all the hospitals to find the one I was in. This sort of kindness is typical of what I have experienced from the people of Cusco.

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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2008

## TO MARKET, TO MARKET

On Christmas Eve I went to a special market held at the Plaza de Amas. Once a year the traditional Peruvians come down from the hills and display their wares for sale. The market was massive with the whole area being blocked off an huge crowds attending to see all sorts of traditional arts and crafts. There was a mix of traditional and western entertainment with Santa Claus appearing to give gifts to the children. After the market I went back to the hospital. At twelve midnight there was a fantastic fire works display to



herald in Christmas Day. From the sixth floor of my hospital room I had a spectacular view. The doctors and nurses on duty all came up to wish me a Feliz Navidad (Merry Christmas) and we all watched the fireworks for about half an hour. To my great surprise they opened the large windows all the way - I thought the windows at this height would not have been able to be opened. Hopefully, I will be released from hospital in the next day or two and then I can continue on to Machu Picchu. The kindness, generosity and quality of service shown to me by all of the people at the hospital has been second to none and I thoroughly recommend San Jose Clinic in Cusco should you ever need it.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 6, 2009

## DOCTOR, DOCTOR, GIVE ME THE NEWS



After twenty odd days in hospital in Cusco it was decided to transfer me to the much lower altitude of Lima and so I arrived in Clinica San Borja on the 4th January after taking a plane flight from Cusco airport to Lima airport. Immediately, team Andre swung in to action and every part of me was x-rayed, scanned, prodded, poked, radiated, hooked up, monitored and ultrasounded. I saw my heart, lungs, blood system, colon, liver, kidneys and other parts I didn't know

existed in action as they tried to find the root cause of the difficulties I am/was having. The working theory is that there was some sort of pulmonary thrombosis accentuated by the high altitude and the original pneumonia. Anyway, am doing pretty well at the moment and breathing is much more regular. Again, I couldn't ask for better service or treatment and I feel like I am in very good and caring hands.

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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2009

## I SCREAM (ICECREAM) - BUT NO-ONE HEARS ME EAT

Today, for the first time after being back in Lima, I got to walk around the hospital precinct. During this time I was able to purchase an ice-cream. I am sure that there will be those who disagree or who think I am exaggerating but - this was the best single bit of food created anytime in the history of human kind. It was so good that I let out a howl of delight startling both my nurse escort and a good proportion of the Lima population. So good, in fact, that it gets a whole blog entry dedicated just to it - to remember forever its succulent chocolate covering, the



creamy enticing interior toffee, the strong piquant nuts embedded throughout and the noble and sturdy stick holding it all together. Not just an ice-cream - but a singular piece of art never to be recreated again. This gastronomic delight almost made me forget the weeks of hospital food which, although acceptable, faded further into insignificance upon each delicate bite. Long live the memory of the ice-cream which I have decided to name Ambrose after Ambrosia, the food of the ancient Greek Gods.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 16, 2009

## FREE AT LAST, FREE AT LAST - LORD ALMIGHTY - FREE AT LAST



This picture shows me in Peruvian poncho about to leave the hospital - somehow I thought the garb was highly appropriate. I am now ensconced in a hostel in Miraflores - in the bridal room (don't worry - the irony has not escaped me). I got the room at a really cheap rate because they all felt sorry for me being in hospital. I must add that this is the same place that I stayed in last time I was in Miraflores and the staff were/are really great. Hugs and kisses all round on my return and long explanations of what I have been up to. I am already planning my trip to Iquitos to visit the jungle, swim the Amazon, run with the animals

and drink lots of Ayahuasca (look it up). In preparation I went for a long walk and ended up buying fresh rolls and food at the supermarket which I am really looking forward to eating after a lengthy quota of hospital food. Oh the simple pleasure of life!!!

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TUESDAY, JANUARY 20, 2009

## IQUITOS - I CAN TASTE IT

Bought my flight to Iquitos for tomorrow. This picture shows the two agents with my flight and hostel tickets - all finalized. I plan to do a few day trips to see some of the Amazon and have received some really good advice from a traveller who has just returned from Iquitos about a good jungle trip to see alligators, piranhas, jaguars and anaconda. Looking forward to having a swim in the Amazon as well. Based on a lot of advice I have made sure I have a room with air conditioning (just like the conquistadors when they first arrived in Peru :)). Next blog will hopefully come from Iquitos - at last.



WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21, 2009

## IQUITOS - HERE I AM

Finally arrived in Iquitos at 5.30pm after the plane flight was delayed for one hour. I had a whole row of seats to myself on the plane - sheer luxury. The sight of the Amazon, both the river and the jungle as we flew into Iquitos was absolutely amazing. Unfortunately, I couldn't get my camera out so will take some pictures when I fly out. Was picked up at the airport by a very modern SUV with great air conditioning and taken to the Ambassador Hostel which also has great air conditioning in the room. Iquitos is hot and humid - the guide told me it is almost 100% humidity and my dripping clothes were a testament to this. Saw the Amazon river and tomorrow I am going out to see some of the wildlife before I trek/canoe into the jungle for a couple of nights stay. The rainy season has started and the river is rising quite rapidly. Many of the houses are built on bamboo/balsa so they can rise with the river. The main transport in Iquitos is the motorcycle or mototaxis which are like motorized rickshaws. There are very few cars around and they are very much the exception rather than the rule



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THURSDAY, JANUARY 22, 2009

## SITES AND SIGHTS TO SEE

Had a very busy day today and visited the floating village (see picture), the market and the animal rescue zoo. It is currently the rainy season (although there has been a shortage of rain in the last week) and the Amazon continues to rise. Eventually, it will rise to the level where the two people are standing in the picture. The houses are built to rise and float on the river and all of these houses will be floating within the next few weeks or so depending on when the rain comes. The market is absolutely amazing - think of Victoria market and multiply by five - there is everything you can possibly imagine. The rescue zoo is also quite amazing with many animals being rescued from both injury in the jungle and from poachers which have illegally caught them to sell on the black market. Most animals are rehabilitated and returned to the jungle but there are a few who will remain at the zoo for their own protection.



SATURDAY, JANUARY 24, 2009

## MEETING THE RELATIVES



Today was an amazing day as I finally got into the Amazon jungle. We started at 7am with a boat trip down the Amazon and some of its tributaries. It was pouring rain and the river was flowing quite fast - it was quite a trip bouncing up and down in a small power boat. We got to the jungle and saw lots of different native birds. We also saw some pink dolphins (they looked silver to me) and lots of insects. We then went to Monkey Island where the wild monkeys came out of the trees and literally jumped in the boat looking for food. We fed them lots of bananas and lemons and they sat in our

laps eating the food - this was a spectacular experience and worth the trip just on its own. We then visited a couple of Indian encampments and hiked a little in the jungle until it was time to come back. By this time the sun was out and the rain had stopped. The river was extremely peaceful and picturesque and the boat trip back was idyllic. It was just an amazing day to experience - worth the whole trip just by itself

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MONDAY, JANUARY 26, 2009

## A SLOTH-FULL DAY IN THE AMAZON

Spent another day in the Amazon where we saw the Yagua (Jaguar) tribe of Indians and participated in some of their ritual dances and learnt to use a blow dart (no animal would ever be in danger from me). We then went into the wilds and saw a whole lot of animals which was supplemented by a region where many wild animals interact with people. I will let these pictures of sloths, toucans, crocodiles, snakes and monkeys speak for themselves. Another fascinating day of interacting with both the Amazon river and the Amazon jungle. PS: The red/orange face is due to the remnants of red markings painted on our faces for the ritual dancing.



*Meeting the relatives*



*Don't let go*



*I win.....by a nose (or a beak)*



*How about a big hug*



TUESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2009

## BUTTERFLIES AND MORE



Today I visited the world famous Butterfly Farm where they not only have butterflies but a lot of wild animals which are being rehabilitated to return to the wild.

Again, many of these have been confiscated by poachers trying to sell them on the black market.

Had a great time feeding, patting and playing with many of the animals.

In addition I am getting to know Iquitos quite well and I was able to travel around the city by mototaxi and boat using the twenty three words of Spanish I have learnt. Adiós para ahora mis amigos.



*I just love sitting on the fence watching the world go by*

*And I just love being fed all sorts of fruit*



WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28, 2009

## HELLO MANATI AND GOODBYE IQUITOS

This morning I visited the Programa de Ecosistemas Acuaticos which has a program to save the Manati which are in danger of extinction. (I forgot my camera and therefore have added this picture from the net). The Manati are really large and slow creatures who feed on the plant life (each adult Manati eats 70kg of plants per day) and therefore are vital to the ecosystem as they stop the rivers from clogging up. I was able to play with them and bottle feed the young ones



with milk. Their skins felt amazing (like rubber wet suits) and they gently nuzzled on my fingers and/or rolled over for me to rub their pink tummies. This afternoon I say goodbye to Iquitos and fly back to Lima to prepare to go to Cuba the day after. Sharon left Australia yesterday to start her journey to Cuba and has already faced flight changes with her direct flight now going through Sydney and suffering a three hour delay. Oh the joys of travelling.

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SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2009

## WHERE ARE ANDRE AND SHARON

For those of you following this blog you will have noticed that there have been no postings for the last week and a half. This is because Havana does not have an Internet system worth speaking about.

It costs \$10US per hour and it takes forty five minutes to open Yahoo. Now that we have arrived in Cancun we will place the postings for Havana in the next day or two.

In the meantime here is Sharon enjoying a Havana Punch



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2009

## MY GIRL IN HAVANA (FRIDAY 30TH JANUARY)



Flew into Havana today and met up with Sharon. However, my perfect record of problems at the airport continued.

Apparently, I only had a 30 day Visa for Peru (even though I requested a three month Visa) but had stayed for 65 days.

This resulted in me having to pay \$1US per day for every day over 30 days. In addition, I had to pay a \$5US penalty because I didn't have my embarkation document which no one told me I needed to get out of the country.

This left me with no money in my wallet. When I arrived in Panama and went to board the connecting plane to Havana I was told I had to buy a Visa into Cuba for \$20US dollars and they would only accept USA cash. I had to run around looking for a EFT machine and just made my flight (they were closing the door on me and did not want to let me in until I stuck my foot in the doorway and refused to move it).

Got into Havana at about 7.30pm and took two hours to get through customs, Firstly, my baggage was the second last off the plane and then everybody's luggage was being searched.

Got to my accommodation at about 10.30pm and Sharon opened the door – a more beautiful sight I cannot remember. We hugged and kissed and caught up on everything. I met the people whose house we are staying at and they are lovely.



Finally went to bed and slept like a baby

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2009

## WALKING THE STREETS OF HABANA VIEJA (OLD HAVANA) (SATURDAY 31ST JANUARY)



A full day of walking around and experiencing the sights of Havana. Old Havana is spectacular with some of the most amazing buildings I have seen.

There is a real carry over from before the revolution and there are many buildings which are extremely opulent and many which have been modelled on buildings in the United States. For example, the Capitol is an exact scaled replica of the House of Congress in the US.

In addition there are cathedrals and state building dating back sixteenth century which are quite spectacular and fortresses and walls all over the place.

We discovered a large group of people wheeling and dealing in the Prado (a main street with a centre walkway and places to rest and gather) only to find out that, as there was no buying and selling of properties, these people were negotiating to swap houses to meet their individual needs.



The old cars in Havana are beyond spectacular with magnificent automobiles from the 50's and 40's abounding. Chevies, Plymouths, Cadillacs etc in excellent condition are everywhere.



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2009

## VIVA LA REVOLUCION (SUNDAY 1ST FEBRUARY)

Spent most of today at the Museo De La Revolucion and heard the other side of the story. Interesting to see the many exhibits talking about the USA Imperialistic expansionist attempts from the middle of the 1800's with the exploitation of the locals for the sugar cane.

The Castro led insurrection/freedom fight began in 1953 and culminated with the overthrow of the Batista government in 1959 and was just the final chapter in a long history of popular uprising.



It was fascinating to hear the Cuban version of history and the very emotive anti-imperialistic rhetoric used. It was also of huge interest to hear the doctrines of equal opportunity, particularly to blacks and women, espoused by the revolution and the attempts to bring education and health to the masses after the victory of 1959.



My inner revolutionary was really stirred and I think I felt myself channelling Che Guevara.

Bought lots of souvenirs at the Museum as a unique opportunity.

Sharon's admiration for the revolutionaries and what they went through is even greater now than before and she looks great in her Che t-shirt.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2009

### T1, T3 BUT WHERE IS THE T2 (MONDAY 2ND FEBRUARY)



Went the total tourist circuit today using the tour buses. For 5CUC (Cuban Convertible Pesos) or about \$5US you can buy an all day pass on three bus lines the T1, T2 and T3. We were able to find the T1 and T3 but could not find the embarkation point for the T2. Nevertheless we saw a lot of the town and discovered many new building and sights. Unfortunately, we did get stuck on the upper level of one of the buses for about an hour as we were locked in when the driver went to lunch (don't ask – it's a long story and we

were not the only ones). Finding food in Havana is very difficult and this is attested by an old Cuban joke which is – Question - What are the three major failings of the revolution? Answer - Breakfast, lunch and dinner. Things are very expensive in Cuba and much is in short supply. However, there is always something that you can get so it is not a total loss and the food is generally fresh and delicious.

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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2009

### HAVANA'ING A REST (TUESDAY 3RD FEBRUARY)

Today walked around a bit and went to the train station to see if we can get tickets to go to places for a day trip. Gave up after a while as it was all too complicated. The queues were huge and there was very little information and assistance. At the bus station there were about 60 people seated ahead of us and we were informed that there would be a five hour wait. Decided to have a rest day where we tried to get a cup of coffee at one of the swank hotels. We were given a menu that ran for four pages and when we asked for a banana split and a coffee each were informed that the only items available was the Classic Sundae and Espresso Coffee. Nothing else on the menu was able to be purchased. We walked for ages and ended up at a place near where we were staying and got a bite to eat. We were extremely weary and returned home at about three in the afternoon only to fall asleep straight away



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2009

## NON COMMUNICADO (WEDNESDAY 4TH FEBRUARY)



International contact in Cuba is nigh on impossible. Wanted to make an international phone call back to Australia so went to the Cuban telephone Company head office to buy a telephone card only to be told that they do not have any cards.

Was sent down to one of their branches and, after waiting in a queue for ages (see Sharon at the end), was also informed that they had no cards.

After much searching found one at a hotel. After paying 10CUC (about \$16AUS) made the call and got less than three minutes.

We then decided to use the Internet which costs 6CUC (about \$10AUS) an hour only to find there were no Internet cards available – apparently the same company make both Internet and Phone cards – go figure. Again, finally found a hotel that had a card for sale.

Unfortunately, the Internet is really slow and censored in Cuba and when I say slow I mean slowwwwwwwwwwwwwww. It took 40 minutes to connect to Yahoo mail and then we ran out of time before we could send a reply. The hotel staff were not at all surprised or phased when we reported this and shrugged their shoulders as if to say “what’s your problem”.

Lucky Havana is such a beautiful and friendly city.



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2009

## THE BUS, THE BUS (THURSDAY 5TH FEBRUARY)



We went on a bus trip to the country today and saw many things. We saw a cigar production factory where every cigar is made by hand including the leaf sorting, the rolling of the leaves, the testing of the pressure of each cigar, the making of the identification wrappers and the boxes they are installed in.

We then saw a typical tobacco farm where rules have just been changed so that farmers only have to give the government the first two tonnes of tobacco leaves and then they can manufacture and sell their own cigars (often much better and cheaper than the government produced ones).

We then were shown a huge mural painted directly onto the cliffs (yes, no canvas just the rocks and soil) and then were privileged to see some spectacular countryside scenery.



We then travelled through some underground caves by boat to see very interesting rock formations including stalagmites and stalactites. Finally, we received a very tasteful lunch before heading back home. In all a very enjoyable day



*Sharon at a tobacco farm  
with the prize pig*



*Tobacco sheds being rebuilt  
after hurricane damage*

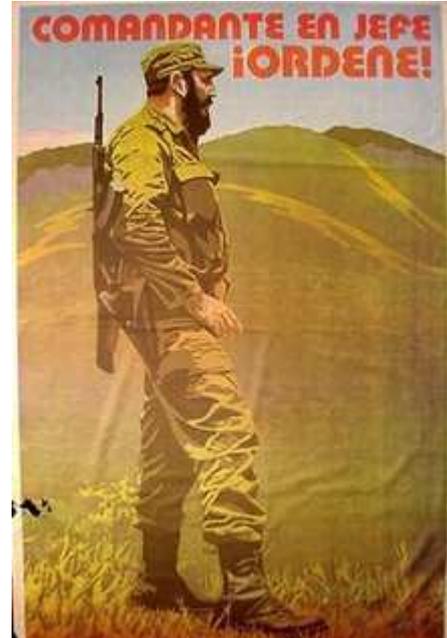
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2009

## MISSION (IM)POSSIBLE (FRIDAY 6TH FEBRUARY)

Went for a long, long walk to Verdado, the next suburb over from Old Havana with a mission in mind. Havana is full of revolutionary posters displayed in most shop windows, posted on billboards and painted on many walls. However, it is impossible to get copies of these and no shop owner was prepared to provide us with their copy.

We received a lead and went to a group called OSPAAAL (Organization of Solidarity of the People of Asia, Africa & Latin America) and found some amazing posters (you can see some at [www.ospaaal.com](http://www.ospaaal.com)).

They were very surprised and quite delighted that we were interested in their artwork and treated us with great respect and dignity. We were shown some amazing posters and were able to procure some of them including a series of ten posters celebrating Che.



We rushed home protecting them from the inclement weather as we were unable to find either a post office to send them home or a place we could get some tubing to roll the posters into.

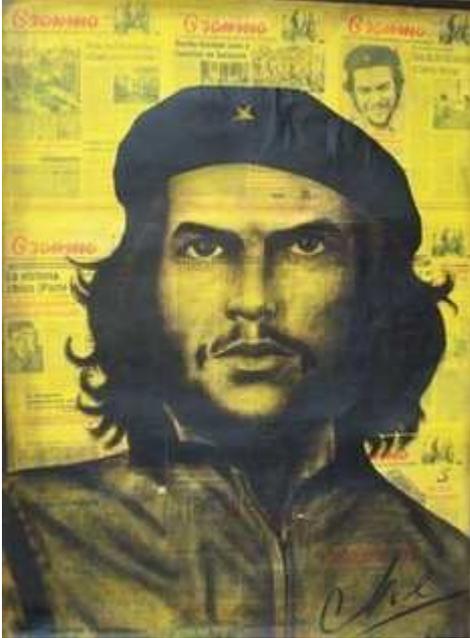
Finally, we were able to procure some tubing with the generous help of our host and they now sit securely in our luggage until we can send them back to Australia.

During our walk we came across the Martin Luther King Jr/Malcolm X Memorial Park which was quite impressive. Not only did it have sculptures of the two civil rights leaders but also had a huge wall of some of their most famous quotes – truly inspirational.



MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2009

## GOODBYE HAVANA, HELLO CANCUN (SATURDAY 7TH FEBRUARY)



Spent the morning having one last look around Havana before leaving for the airport.

Our hosts had arranged for a taxi to take us to the airport at 12.30pm so visited the market and a couple of favourite shops before saying our farewells.

The airport was relatively easy and after we paid our taxi fare and exit fees (which were more than our entrance to Cuba fees) we had a few CUC left over so bought a book about the revolution and another Che t-shirt for Sharon which left us with just enough money to buy a bottle of water.

The flight over was only an hour and a bit although the plane left an hour late (never found out why).

Arrived in Cancun in the dark and got a huge culture shock - very different to Havana. The taxis wanted \$60US to take us downtown and this was not negotiable so took a bus for \$3.50US each.



*The airport at Havana has flags of all of the nations that Cuba deals with hanging from the ceiling*



The money system in Cancun is confusing as they use both pesos and US dollars and the symbol is the same for both. Found a hostel to stay at through one of the many, many, many people touting at the bus station. It was only a five minute walk and we arrived, paid and just crashed for the night.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2009

## ALTAR BOY AND ALTAR GIRL

Took a day or so to acclimatize to Mexico particularly the abundance of food and provisions.

Yesterday we went to Chichen Itza which was very spectacular. It was great having a guide who explained a lot of the ancient traditions. Historians do not know what happened to the Mayan people and their culture - my theory is that they basically sacrificed themselves out of existence with blood sacrifices being a huge part of the culture as it was thought to bring "new blood and life" to the gods.



Many of these involved cutting the victim's heart out with a sacrificial knife (see picture below). Then there were the beheadings, of particular fascination were those of the captain of the winning side in the local ball game played to honour the gods. The main temple (the site of most sacrifices) is an architectural marvel and was designed to act as a calendar with astonishing accuracy.

The other ruins around the temple supplied a great insight into life and culture at the time. A handy hint in Cancun is that you can do a lot of trips for free (or very cheaply) as all of the hotels have time-share type presentations.



We quickly discovered that sitting through an hour of these enabled you to get free meals and excursions saving hundreds and hundreds of dollars. (There are many Aussies doing this - surprise, surprise).

Tomorrow, we are going on a free submarine ride to explore the reefs after we get our free breakfast and then we come back for our free lunch.

*Now that I have this sacrificial knife I  
can.....hmmmmm*

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2009

## FUN AND GAMES - NOT JUST AT THE MARDI GRAS

Got into New Orleans on Thursday night after another fun airport experience where we had to wait for three hours to be processed by USA immigration and customs resulting in us missing our connecting flight.

When we rang the number of the hostel to pick us up at 10pm we got a "not in service" message. Fun and games then ensued but we finally arrived at our destination at 11.30pm.



Anyway, New Orleans has geared up for the Mardi Gras and we have seen a lot of different parades (similar to Moomba) where they throw beads and cups from the floats - now have a substantial collection of both.



The streets are full of music, particularly jazz and there are a huge number of eating places with a wide variety of foods.

We discovered a record shop that sells a lot of old vinyl and CD's and they made up a CD of rare music for us by copying over the music from old vinyl singles.

Other highlights to date include The Museum Of The

Confederacy, all you can eat jazz brunches, visiting the House Of Blues, riding the Mississippi river, encountering our first gun totting southerner, visiting a memorabilia shop which had signed guitars from many famous musicians including Janis Joplin (\$90,000US), Cream (\$45,000US), Rolling Stones (\$50,000US) and B.B. King (\$35,000) just to mention a few.

We are currently investigating buying/renting a car and will soon continue on to Alabama



*Sharon collecting beads at one of the many Mardi Gras parades*

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2009

## SWEET HOME ALABAMA



Caught the Greyhound bus to go to Montgomery in Alabama and arrived after a nine hour trip. Wow, Montgomery is so different to New Orleans.

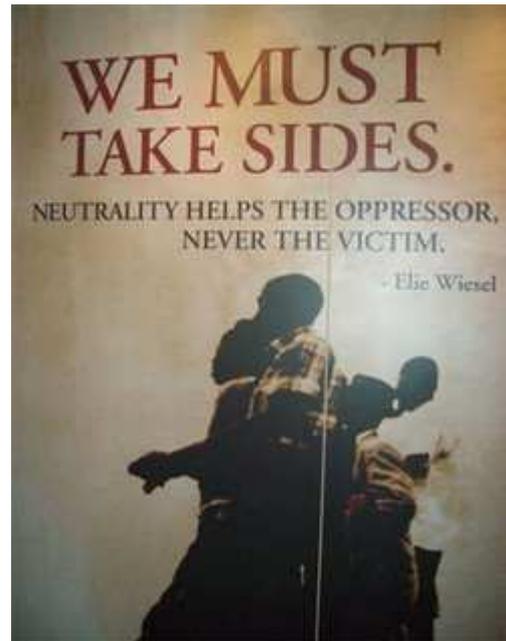
We hit the Civil rights trail in the city and saw some amazing sights. The Rosa Parks Library and Museum was truly unique and, without doubt, it was one of the best interactive museums we have ever seen.

The time bus in the Children's Wing was spectacular and gave a brilliant exhibition of the struggle for rights since the 1800s.

Similarly, the Civil Rights Memorial Centre was an inspirational tribute to those who lost their lives and those who struggled for Civil Rights.

Montgomery has proved to be a quiet town which has embraced its place in the Civil Rights movement with dignity and pride which is quite ironic given its original strong opposition to the movement in the 50's and 60's.

In addition, Montgomery is the first place that we have been to where we have really missed having a car.



*Outside the Civil Rights Memorial Centre*

The large distances between locations of interest and the locals amazement that we are "public transporting" have both contributed to our sense of "automotive deprivation" - will need to check out rental options.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2009

## ON THE FREEDOM ROAD

After a day of rest yesterday where we watched TV whilst not sleeping we caught the Greyhound bus to Birmingham and arrived at 12 noon.

We have learnt that you really need a car to travel around America anywhere outside of the major cities. Public transport is very sporadic and it is almost impossible to find out timetables and connections.



Luckily we have the Greyhound to connect us between Montgomery, Selma and Birmingham so we don't have to walk the route as did the participants of the great Civil Rights march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965. Looking forward to seeing some of the civil rights sites/sights in Birmingham including the Civil Rights District, the 16th Street Baptist Church, the Civil Rights Institute and the Kelly Ingram Centre.



In addition we are keen to see the Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame. On a different note, it was great coming to an area which has supermarkets and department stores.

We were able to buy a few essentials including fresh food which has provided a striking contrast to the take away fare we have had to eat for the last week or so (although I do recommend the Waffle House chain should you ever be in the USA - fantastic hash browns and omelettes).

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2009

## STATUES AND STATUTES

Birmingham is an impressive city which appears to be determined to face its segregationist past rather than sweep it under the rug. To this end the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and the Kelly Ingram Park stand as testaments to the city's willingness to move with dignity away from its shameful past.

This can best be demonstrated by the inscriptions under the various monuments in the park.

The one under that of the dogs and police attacking innocent demonstrators reading:

"This sculpture is dedicated to the foot soldiers of the Birmingham Civil Rights movement. With gallantry, courage and great bravery they faced the violence of attack dogs, high powered water hoses and bombings. They were the fodder in the advance against injustice, warriors of a just cause: They represent humanity unshaken in their firm belief in their nation's commitment to liberty and justice for all. We salute the men and women who were the soldiers of this great cause."



In a similar vein, the inscription under the Martin Luther King statue reads, in part:

"His dream liberated Birmingham from itself and began a new day of love, mutual respect and cooperation. This statue of Dr. Martin Luther King is erected by the citizens of Birmingham as an indication of their esteem for him and in appreciation of his sacrificial service to mankind."

It was an extremely moving day spent looking at the exhibitions that both celebrated and documented this tumultuous time in the struggle for equal rights and dignity.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2009

## WE'RE JAZZED

Went to the Alabama Jazz Hall Of Fame and had a spectacular time.

We were really lucky to be guided by Frank "Doc" Adams, the first inductee into the Hall of Fame. Doc Adams has played with some of the greats including Duke Ellington, Lucky Millinder, Tiny Bradshaw and Sun Ra. (He learned to play the clarinet from his older brother, Oscar Adams, Jr., who was Alabama's first Black Supreme Court Justice and his father, Oscar Adams, Sr., who played trombone with W. C. Handy, the Father of the Blues).



This was a most inspiring tour and "Doc" played us a number of classical jazz pieces on his clarinet, even making up a song for Sharon on the spot that is now officially called "Sharon's Be Bop Blues". It was fascinating to hear a first hand account of some of the major jazz influences and he shared a whole heap of stories about some of these famous people.



*Outside the rebuilt 16th Street Baptist Church*

We also visited the 16th Street Baptist Church and saw a film with historical footage of the famous bombing which gained the Civil Rights movement world wide recognition and sympathy. Finally we had some real down south home cooking at Mrs B's on 4th - the best meal we have had in ages.

All in all, a brilliant day

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2009

## LONG DISTANCE INFORMATION - GIVE ME MEMPHIS TENNESSEE

Got into Memphis early in the afternoon today and booked a hotel for a week.

We were really lucky after receiving some great advice from a taxi driver who talked himself out of a fare by telling us about a good economic hotel right in the middle of the downtown region.

Went for a walk to the Tourist Information Centre only to discover it had closed an hour earlier due to blocked sewerage pipes. We then went to the famous Beale Street (just around the corner from where we are staying) and our senses were immediately overloaded with the sounds and sights of the blues.



Sat in a park and listened to a great blues band belting out some of the classics of the sixties and seventies then had a bite to eat. We discovered the B.B.King Club and will go there on Friday night. There is so much to see here in Memphis it is taking us some time to work out our itinerary.



Tomorrow we will go to Sun Records who also have a free shuttle service to Graceland. We also have to fit in the Delta Blues Museum, the Gibson Guitar Factory Tour, the National Civil Rights Museum, the Memphis Rock n' Soul Museum and the Stax Museum of American Soul Music just to name a few. In addition, almost every corner has some sort of historical remnant or reminder of the glory days of blues and rock and roll - what a place to be.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2009

## BACK TO THE ROOTS

What a day - we visited both Sun Studios and the Memphis Museum of Rock and Soul. As you enter the recording studio at Sun you feel as though you have stepped back in time - it actually has the original acoustic tiles on the walls & ceiling as well as some of the original instruments and recording devices.



Standing in the room where Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Roy Orbison, B. B. King (just to mention a few) all recorded caused us to have goose bumps - this is where Rock and Roll was born - this is the only studio that is a designated national historic landmark - this studio is nothing less than awe inspiring.



*Who is that famous Elvis backing musician?*

Similarly, the Rock and Soul Museum brilliantly tells the stories of musical pioneers and legends of all racial and socio-economic backgrounds who, for the love of music, overcame many obstacles to create musical sounds that changed the world.

Both seeing the many original artifacts and listening to the original music and stories was very emotional and soul stirring - a magnificent day.



SUNDAY, MARCH 1, 2009

## LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL



*Blind Mississippi Morris playing the blues*

Fought our way through the snow - yes it is snowing today in Memphis - to go to the world famous B. B. King's Restaurant and Blues Club on Beale Street where we heard Blind Mississippi Morris and the B. B. King Allstars Band featuring Z'Da.

Whilst the food was not bad, Morris was fantastic and really lived up to his reputation of being a great blues man. Unfortunately, the Allstars were a bit disappointing as they tended to play pop soul music rather than blues.

Earlier in the day we found a supermarket and were able to stock up on some fresh food including fruit - we know that this may sound mundane but it is a real luxury when travelling in a country where fast food and sugar seem to be the order of the day. Had lots of fun playing in the snow when it first appeared around mid morning and all of the locals thought we were crazy.

We also heard one of the best/funniest lines we have ever heard when we went to a car rental place near the motel where we are staying. Upon finding it closed we asked the next door garage owner when the rental place would be open, to which he replied: "won't be open - he's in jail - he stole a lot more cars than he ever rented". We just couldn't stop laughing.

Sharon in the snow outside  
B.B. Kings Blues Club



MONDAY, MARCH 2, 2009

## THAT'S ALRIGHT MAMA

Today we visited Graceland and saw everything Elvis. We saw his house, his cars, his planes, his grounds, his records, his trophies, his clothes, his gym, his stables, his meditation place, his burial place and above all his merchandise.

All in all we found this to be the most disappointing part of the trip so far as it was so grossly commercialized and, in our opinion, had little/none of the soul that was his music.

The whole place lacked the air of excitement and energy that the rest of Memphis has.



In contrast, we visited the National Civil Rights Museum which was built on the spot that Martin Luther King was assassinated (the Lorraine Motel).



The preserved site of Martin Luther King's assassination

Unlike Graceland, this place captured the spirit and soul of the Civil Rights Movement. It was eerie to stand in the location that James Earl Ray supposedly shot from, as it was to be in the same spot that Martin Luther King was standing at the time of his assassination.

The love and respect for Martin Luther King Jr. and his accomplishments came through every presentation in the museum and it was a very moving day.

TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 2009

## STACKS AND STACKS OF STAX

Today we visited the Stax Museum of American Soul Music which celebrates the music of such greats as Isaac Hayes, Booker T & The MG's, Aretha Franklin, Al Green, Earth Wind & Fire, the Staple Singers, Wilson Pickett, Luther Ingram, Albert King, the Bar-Kays, Ike & Tina Turner, Ann Peebles, Al Green, Sam Cooke, Rufus Thomas and many others.

It was interesting to hear that in an environment of racial segregation and tension, Stax was "color blind" having blacks and whites working together at all levels of the industry. It was the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. which caused distrust and unrest to occur which led to the ultimate demise of the record label.

Eventually the building and its surrounds were levelled to the ground (including the Satellite Record Store which was its forerunner) and the current museum was built on the original site after an anonymous donation of two and a half million dollars from two business people.



*Satellite Record Shop – the beginning of Stax Records*

The love and respect of the music and the label's accomplishments shines through the whole museum and there are many great artifacts including Isaac Hayes' amazing Cadillac Impala.

Later in the day we visited the Centre for Southern Folklore and Cafe which aims to preserve the historical content and resources associated with the people, music and traditions of the region. It has a lot of exhibitions and produces festivals and musical entertainments (via their famous brown bag lunches) - all free of charge.

SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 2009

## DOWN TO THE CROSSROADS - HELLHOUNDS ON OUR TRAIL

We rented a car and toured down Highway 61 to Clarksdale to see the Delta Blues Museum and then on to Indianola to see the B.B. King Museum. Both of these were quite spectacular with lots of original exhibits, memorabilia, pictures and films.



We talked with the Communications Manager of the B.B. King who gave us the inside scoop of how it was developed, how much it cost and how important the museum is to Indianola's future. On the way back the GPS system in the car took us to the wrong place and we ended up about one hundred and eighty miles away - as a result we didn't get back to about one in the morning but got quite a good view of Arkansas and Mississippi at night.

The next day we went to Nashville and caught up with The Grand Old Opry - a 390 mile (not kilometer) round trip. During this time Sharon got to see her first American bookshop - a Barnes and Noble. I had to drag her out of the store kicking and screaming.

Today we drove around Memphis hitting bookshops and DVD/CD shops and ended up buying some great DVDs relating to Blues music which we have never seen in Australia. Memphis is amazing with music everywhere. We caught a great performance in a park, just two minutes away from where we are staying, and watched some great blues music free of charge.



We also saw a couple of acts, again free of charge, at the Centre for Southern Folklore - a group of people dedicated to documenting and presenting the people, music and traditions of the region (check out their website at [www.southernfolklore.com/](http://www.southernfolklore.com/) - especially their Archives section). All in all, a few days completely immersed in the Blues - how great is that?

(PS: on our Nashville trip we stopped off at Loretta Lynne's Kitchen to have a bite to eat where we met some touring dogs who travelled on a trailer like device attached to a motorbike and who loved to wear their goggles when on the road - check out the picture)

SUNDAY, MARCH 15, 2009

## CHICAGO BLUES

Got into Chicago a few days ago after a nine hour Greyhound bus trip which was actually quite fun. After getting settled in our hostel we ventured out into the windy city which was very cold (31 degrees Fahrenheit or -1 degree Celsius) to see some of the nicest architecture we have ever seen.

We went to the Chicago Cultural Centre and got a tour of the inside design which was extremely elaborate and ornate - full of marble and Tiffany stained glass. We also had some of the best soup I have ever tasted at a bakery nearby.

The next day we went down to 2120 South Michigan Avenue - the location of Chess records and the home of the Blues Heaven Foundation - where some of the best Chicago blues artists recorded, including Willie Dixon, Koko Taylor, Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry, Buddy Guy, the Rolling Stones. and Hounddog Dumitriu (see picture).



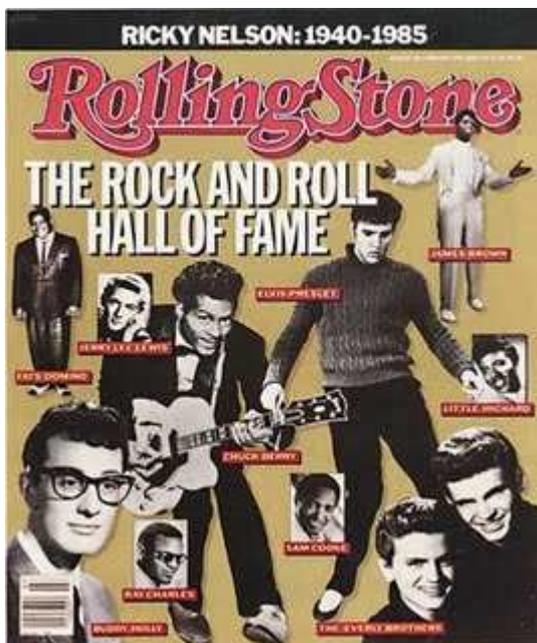
Yesterday we went to the St Patrick's Day parade as did about 20,000 other people - we saw many, many people dressed up in green looking like leprechauns. Today we went and had a Gospel Brunch at the House of Blues which was a spectacular event, both musically and gastronomically.

One of the great things about Chicago is that it has 24 hour public transport passes which allow you to see a lot of the city very cheaply - we have spent much time riding around and hopping on and off to view sites of interest including the Wrigley Field Baseball Stadium and many of the places where the Blues Brothers film was shot.

Unfortunately, Chicago is trying very hard to disassociate itself from its gangster/prohibition past so there are no markers/reminders of any of the places so prominent in shows like the Untouchables especially since most of the buildings have been torn down. Nevertheless we have seen the locations of some things like the St Valentines Massacre place, the site where Al Capone lived, the cemeteries where some of the more notorious are buried etc.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2009

## ROCK AND ROLL FOREVER



We hired a car and drove to Cleveland to see the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum. On the way we had to detour due to roadworks and our GPS system almost took us to Canada - we got off the border crossing just in time.

What a magnificent place is the Hall of Fame - 6 floors of exhibitions, interactive displays, films, music and lots more. We spent all of today looking through the exhibits and will go back tomorrow as there is so much to see and so much to do.

This place is truly remarkable and has been set up with great love and respect of the music/people that it documents and honours. My favourite exhibition so far has been the psychedelic Porsche owned by Janis Joplin but there are many things that run a close second including the interactive displays where you can listen to the songs of inductees and trace all of their influences and listen to their music as well. I loved the Rolling Stones pinball machine which took me back a few years to my university days where, if I say so myself, I would have got a Distinction in Pinball Playing if it was offered as a course.

I was finally able to obtain a couple of Sugar Pie Desanto CD's and meet some people who had actually heard of her. The only disappointment was the fact that you could not take pictures inside the museum - therefore the pictures in this blog are downloaded from the net.



*The magnificent Rock and Roll Hall of Fame building*

SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 2009

## GUITAR MAN - READY TO TRAVEL

We went back to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame for the second day and had another great day of fun and frivolity amongst the exhibitions.

We paid for an upgrade to the two day ticket price but when we got to the entrance door the staff recognized us as the "two Australians who loved Rock and Roll" and they were really chuffed that we had come back.

As a result they refunded our money and told us that we shouldn't have to pay. We had a long talk to many of the staff and got a lot of "inside information" which made it even more special.

Again we spent the whole day at the Museum and finished off by buying a couple of things from the gift shop.

The next day we headed back to Chicago and decided to stay at a hotel near the airport since the GPS in our car was a bit dicey. Amongst other things it had tried to send us the wrong way up a couple of one way streets, it had taken us to a Kmart which didn't exist and it had almost taken us across the Canadian border.



Today and most of tomorrow are "rest days" while we prepare to catch the plane to London tomorrow night for the start of the European leg of our journey. Hope my new guitar (see picture) will pass through customs so that I can use it to busk in London to help pay for the trip.

TUESDAY, MARCH 24, 2009

## RETURN TO CIVILIZATION - ALMOST LIKE WE KNOW IT

We got into Heathrow at 9.30am local time after a rather uneventful flight with British Airways. We had a last minute hitch the day before when we tried to check in using the online process only to discover that Qantas had not issued the tickets.



A call to Qantas resulted in the answer - they are in the queue and should be issued in an hour. We refused to accept this and after some time of discussion they issued them on the spot. We then had to print out all the e-tickets and schedules etc however when we got to the counter they didn't even look at them (c'est la vie).

When we got to Heathrow we checked out a whole lot of travel options and, after getting some wrong information, we caught a train, another train and then another train to Sharon's nephew's place where we are staying in Gipsy Hill.



*A touch of home – good coffee,  
cable television and  
vegemite sandwiches*

After lugging our suitcases up a gigantic hill we finally arrived and promptly fell asleep on the couches.

Today we looked around and went shopping where we found Vegemite, proper bread and real cheese. It is my theory that a country's evolution is not measured by its laws, its buildings or architecture or its customs but rather by the quality of its food especially its chocolate. We were able to have a proper breakfast consisting of toast with butter and Vegemite and real tea - what magnificence.

THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 2009

## THE 6TH BEATLE - OR JUST A WANNABEE?

Went down to Abbey Road and walked in the footsteps of the Fab Four. It was quite surprising as there were no markers or indicators of the crossing which featured in one of the most recognizable record covers of all time.



We took our pictures next to the Abbey Road road sign just to prove that we were really there. We also spent a lot of the day at Westminster Abbey where it was fascinating to see the markers and graves of so many people we were taught about in high school history.

Oliver Cromwell, Mary Queen of Scots, Queen Victoria, Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, Winston Churchill and many more are buried and immortalized in this church which is steeped in over a thousand years of history. The architecture and sculptures are truly a marvel and well worth seeing.

We also had Twinings Tea in the cloisters of the Abbey - how English is that? Also today we went to Westminster Cathedral which also has a long history and great architecture. Finally we spent some of the day riding around on the double decker buses viewing the sites/sights of London from the top deck whilst sheltering from the rain which was pouring on and off throughout the day.



Yesterday we visited the Tower of London where we saw the gruesome history of England in its full glory and learnt all about the many beheadings.

We also visited Parliament House, Buckingham Palace (where the lights were on upstairs), Trafalgar Square and All Hallows Church. Finally we walked through St James Park and took pictures of the many frolicking squirrels.

SATURDAY, MARCH 28, 2009

## RETURN OF THE HIGH PRIESTESS



All hail the High Priestess returning to her ancient haunt of Stonehenge to examine how it is holding up.

She ordered me (her slave) to hire a care and together we travelled to Salisbury Plain to have a look around. We took an audio tour of Stonehenge in the freezing cold and rain - I am sure that, with the wind chill factor, it was about five below zero.

The canteen made a fortune selling hot tea and coffee. We then travelled to Bristol to catch up with Sharon's nephew who is living and working there and had a good look around the town.

Finally we drove to Wales where we will spend some time looking around. Basically, we have rented a car for a few days to drive around the countryside and get a look of life outside of London.

We ended up buying a GPS as the rental company did not provide any and we thought it would be a good investment - plus we got so lost it was the only way we were going to find our way around. We intend using it in Ireland and Europe when we get there and then back in Australia when we return - they are great and I thoroughly recommend them.

After America it was great getting in a car and driving on the right side of the road even if it was down narrow country lanes that will only fit one car at a time.



WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1, 2009

## EXTERMINATE.....EXTERMINATE.....

Had a fun time in Wales and saw a number of places including an exhibition of Dr. Who paraphernalia and props in Cardiff where much of the new series was filmed.

Saw the Tardis - see picture of me entering - and a great exhibition of the Daleks taking over the world.

We also visited Cardiff Castle which has a long and illustrious history and is reputed to be a place once inhabited by both Uther Pendragon and his son Arthur.

The Castle was transformed into a Gothic fantasy by the eccentric architect Burges for the 3rd Marquess of Bute, who by the 1860s was reputed to be the richest man in the world. Within Gothic fairytale towers there are opulent interiors, rich with murals, stained glass, marble, gilding and elaborate wood carvings. We drove around Wales for a while taking in the beautiful countryside before we returned to London where we have been basically planning our trip to Ireland.



We intend renting a car and going over by ferry so that we can see the countryside at our leisure. While we have been planning we visited the British Museum which has quite a collection of artifacts from many different countries.

In addition we have been having leisurely brunches in a number of places and have been enjoying the food, especially the hot cups of proper British tea.

THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2009

## ANCHORS AWEIGH

I am writing this blog entry as we are crossing from Wales to Ireland by ferry at 9.30pm.

We have rented a car for a week so that we can tour Ireland and fulfill Sharon's lifelong ambition of seeing the land of her ancestors and discovering why she has a love all all things made out of potato.

Just quietly, I think she also believes that there is a leprechaun waiting somewhere ready to give her his pot of gold.



The views are quite spectacular as we can see the bright lights of the city of Holyhead in Wales from which the ferry departs. It is lovely watching the lights bounce off the water and to see the clear water churning under the ferry.

The ferry trip should take about three and a half hours so we should arrive at lam.

I hope we can find somewhere to stay - otherwise it will be night night in the car.

SUNDAY, APRIL 5, 2009

## WHY DOES THE LEPRECHAUN HAVE A POT OF GOLD.....

.....he needs it to pay for food and lodgings.

Ireland is beautiful, Ireland is fun and Ireland is very, very expensive.

We have travelled around Dublin, Kilkenny, Cork, Tipperary and Limerick and have been astounded by the cost of basics in the country.

A normal pizza is 14 Euros or \$28 dollars Australian. A basic lunch costs about 30 Euros (\$60 AUS) and basic lodgings are 70 Euros (\$140AUS) a night. The cost of petrol is \$2.20 AUS a litre and a laundrette costs 18 Euros (\$36AUS) - we really don't know how people live in Ireland.



Apart from this Ireland is full of beautiful countryside, many castles and lots and lots of churches. The people are wonderfully friendly and very interested in Australia as everyone we have spoken to has some sort of connection with our country.



It has been great fun driving around at a leisurely pace and stopping wherever we want to. We visited Blarney Castle to see the Blarney Stone (see picture) which was right at the top of the castle and can only be accessed by walking up some very steep and narrow steps. We are slowly heading to Northern Ireland before we catch the ferry across to Scotland.

FRIDAY, APRIL 10, 2009

## FROM IRELAND TO SCOTLAND....THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

It has been a few days since we posted a blog due to the lack of Internet access in the countryside of both Ireland and Scotland.

We left Limerick and travelled through County Galway taking in some of the most beautiful scenery we have seen so far thanks to the west coast of Ireland. I have never seen so many sheep and in many places they had the run of the road - it was fun watching the young lambs "being really cute". We landed in Belfast where we saw the sights of the town including the area most involved in the Troubles.



We spoke to many people who told us stories of growing up at that time and all we can say is thank god (whichever one you believe in) that we live in Australia. Sharon fulfilled a long held ambition by visiting the Sinn Fein headquarters where she bought a truly revolutionary t-shirt. We also saw many of the political murals (from both sides) which are still displayed with pride - not one of them was defaced in any way. We then took the ferry from Belfast to Stranraer in Scotland and found a lovely B & B where we got great advice on local attractions.



We spent the next day driving around the area and nearly got blown away (literally) at the Mull of Galloway - the most southerly point in Scotland. Sharon nearly fainted when we got to Wigtown which is known as the book capital of Scotland. She just stood and stared at all of the twenty odd bookshops which exist in virtually the one street.

I joined the library where we were able to watch a pair of nesting ospreys via a webcam setup. This was a real local attraction and numerous people came up to check out what was happening allowing us to hear many stories about the ospreys and their young over the years. The countryside was so beautiful and the people so friendly we stayed an extra day in Stranraer before we headed off to Glasgow via the coastal road. We have taken a tour of the city and will head out tomorrow to discover more of Scotland.

SUNDAY, APRIL 12, 2009

## CLIMBING UP THE WALLS

After Glasgow we visited Edinburgh and took a tour of the town sites. Whilst there is a great rivalry between the two cities they are very different in so many ways.

We then drove down to the Lakes District, crossing the Scottish/English border, and stayed in Carlisle where we went to the Saturday market and indulged in some of the great multicultural food - I ate Polish and Sharon ate Indian.



The next day, after seeing Carlisle Castle, we headed for Hadrian's Wall which we climbed at the Fort Birdos point after driving along the length of the wall for quite a few miles.

We then headed south to the Lakes District and had a lovely lunch at Talkin Tarn which we eventually walked around viewing the native wildlife. This was followed by a drive to Penrith to observe Arthur's Round Table - a neolithic henge - not the wooden round table of legend.



We then visited Brougham Castle (after crossing an ancient bridge with the sign - Warning, Weak Bridge) before settling in for the evening. All in all, a very scenic and peaceful Easter Sunday driving around some beautiful countryside.

THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2009

## TALES OF ADVENTURE

After the Lakes District we travelled down to Nottingham where we got a delightful B & B.

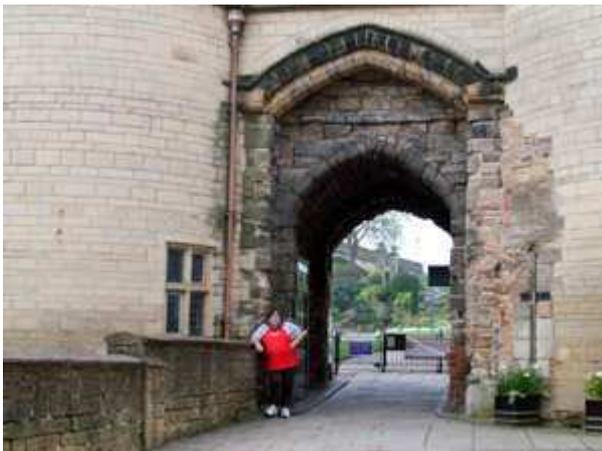
Once we had settled in, we went to Sherwood Forest to see all things about Robin Hood (hooray, hooray).

I purchased a Robin hat and a Shield and Crossbow set and thus was able to travel around the forest with my fair maiden (Sharon) totally protected.

Sherwood is a beautiful forest with many very, very old oak trees. The next day we went to Nottingham Castle where the Sheriff (boo, boo) lived.



The actual castle was built over in the 17th century after it was destroyed but a bit of the original still remains. We had lots of fun pretending to be outlaws before we started heading back to London where we have been for the last couple of days.



We returned the rented car and got a three day discount because they kept us waiting when we originally picked it up.

We intend spending a few day chilling out at Sharon's nephew's place - yes I know - we are the relatives who came and stayed. We are planning our return to Australia in the near future.

*Outside the castle of the Sheriff of Nottingham – waiting for Robin Hood to make an appearance*

FRIDAY, APRIL 24, 2009

## COMING HOME

Well we finally did it - got on the plane and came back to Australia.

When we rang Qantas to arrange the flight back we were uncertain when we could return as we thought that it would be difficult to get seats.

The people at Qantas laughed at us and told us that this was no problem as there were many, many places available.



On the flight back both Sharon and I each had a whole row of seats to ourselves on both connections to Australia. We were able to lie down and sleep, lie down and watch the entertainment screen and lie down and eat in bed".



In fact there were so few people on the flights we almost all had a flight attendant each. The Qantas flight went without a hitch and it was the only flight during the whole trip that actually left and landed at the advertised time.

It was great arriving in Australia where we were able to use the ATM machines without a transaction fee. We came home to our beloved dogs and much cuddling and licking took place before we collapsed into bed exhausted after a twenty-two hour trip from one hemisphere to the other.

Soon we will wake up.

*Sweet dreams on the way home - all air travel should be like this*