

## South Pacific Vacation – Day 1 – Saturday February 25<sup>th</sup> 2012

Yesterday Marie and Kal Tinka and Marcia and Jim Elving started a new three week vacation. Marie and Marcia are sisters and the four of us enjoy traveling together. This is the tenth international trip that we all have taken together over the course of the past eight years.

We will be spending a few days in Southern California visiting friends and family and then fly to Tahiti in the South Pacific. There we will stay a couple of days at a resort in the capital city of Papeete before boarding a small cruise ship, the *Paul Gauguin* for an eleven day journey through French Polynesia's Society Islands and New Zealand's Cook Islands.

Yesterday was a travel day. Marie and Kal flew from Dayton, Ohio through Denver to San Diego on Frontier Airlines. Marcia and I flew from Albany, New York through Charlotte to San Diego on US Airways (using Frequent Flyer miles and riding in First Class!) At 8:45PM we met at the San Diego airport and proceeded to Fox Rental Cars where we picked up our rental car. We had reserved a mid-sized SUV, a Dodge Journey, but they upgraded us to a full size SUV, a new Ford Explorer. We drove to our lodgings for the night, a nearby Holiday Inn Express where we all slept well.



We all were up early this morning, still on East Coast time. We pack up and hit the road about 8AM. It is a fine sunny day in San Diego. Temperature at 8AM is 56 degrees.

We start a drive up the Pacific coastline, first driving along Mission Beach before stopping at La Jolla Underwater Park. We walk the beautiful trails along the cliffs and see many hummingbirds, cormorants, seagulls, pelicans, and two sea lions. Our next stop is the Torrey Pines Glider Sport Parasailing Park, where we walk along more towering cliffs and get great views of the ocean and surfers. We next stop at Torrey Pines State Park. As this is a Saturday and the weather

is great, the park is packed with happy locals hiking and exercising. Parking is limited, so we confine our activities to a short walk above the beach.

By now the temperature is in the upper 60s and we head out for today's final destination, Palm Desert. We continue along the coast to Carlsbad, stopping for a quick lunch at *In-And-Out-Burger* (our first experience!) before heading East on mostly two-line scenic roads. The sights are like nothing we've ever seen as we drive up to 5000 feet elevations through the Santa Rosa Mountains, San Bernardino National Forest and numerous Indian Reservations. The mountains



change from large stone formations to smaller stone covered ones to scrub forest. We can see snow on the highest mountain tops. At 3PM we start our decent down winding roads, seeing Palm Springs and Palm Desert below us. Entering Palm Desert, we see that the afternoon temperature is near 80.

At 3:30PM we arrive at the beautiful home of Brett Fenson (the son of Marie and Marcia's cousin, Judi), his wife Jacqueline, and their two children Camille (8 years old) and Andrew (5 years old). We spend the rest of the day and night at the Fensons, enjoying great conversations, a nice dinner, and interacting with their two wonderful children.



Best, Jim



### **South Pacific Vacation – Day 2 – Sunday February 26<sup>th</sup>**

We wake up this morning in Palm Desert California at the beautiful home of Jackie and Brett Fenson. Brett is a doctor (an anesthesiologist) and is on call today, so he says goodbye to us at 7:30AM. We enjoy a great breakfast and more good conversation with Jackie and young Camille and Andrew, say our goodbyes and depart Palm Desert at 10AM for the several hour drive back to San Diego. What a nice visit we had! It is 78 degrees when we leave Palm Desert.

We decide to drive back by another route and head south past the Salton Sea (a huge salt water lake 230 feet below sea level), then head west on route 78 towards the mountains. This land is all flat desert, with irrigated farms growing crops like dates and even some vineyards but is somewhat boring. We then start driving through the mountains on incredibly winding roads, rising to an elevation of over 4000 feet. The mountains change from stone covered to forested as we reach Cleveland National Forest. Today is Sunday and there are many motorcyclists out enjoying the twisty drive.

At 1:30PM we reach the San Diego Zoo "Safari Park" a 900 acre wild animal park. The weather is great.....brilliant sunshine and 68 degrees. We have an enjoyable 2 hours walking the park, viewing the exhibits, and taking the tram ride past the African wild animals living in a "natural" habitat.

We drive now to San Diego and check into our hotel for the next three nights, the Best Western Blue Sea Lodge. It is located right on Mission Beach and we have large rooms with nice views of the ocean, the 30 yard wide beach, and the popular walkway running the length of the beach. As we are right on the coast, it's cooler...60 degrees.

At 6PM we drive to a local Mexican restaurant to meet my sister Judy and her husband John (who live in San Clemente) and their daughter Jenn and son Todd.....my nephew and niece (who live in San Diego). We learn that John has hurt his back so he and Judy will not be joining us! The seven of us (Jenn's friend Phil is also along) and we sit down for



dinner. Great conversation as we catch up on what we have all been doing and get to know each other better. We must have had a great time, as we do not leave the restaurant until after 9:30PM.

### South Pacific Vacation – Day 3 – Monday February 27<sup>th</sup>

Today is the third day we'll be in Southern California prior to our flight to the South Pacific. We plan on largely spending today sightseeing in the immediate San Diego area. My niece, Jennifer Bethe, has volunteered to be our "tour guide". She has lived in San Diego for twenty years and is an English teacher in the San Diego school system. Last night at dinner she told us that she mostly teaches students whose primary language is not English. Interestingly, a majority of her students are from Iraq and members of their small Chaldean Catholic sect. Saddam Hussein had utilized members of this sect as aides and security, and many fled to the San Diego area after his fall.



We all meet at 8AM at a restaurant across from our hotel on Mission Beach and enjoy a hearty breakfast. Today's weather is forecasting rain which we are told is rare in San Diego. First Jenn takes us on a walk along the beach walkway north into the Pacific Beach area. This is an interesting area of eclectic beachfront cottages and rentals. We walk out on the Crystal Pier, built in 1925 with rental cottages added (right on the sides of the pier) in 1935.



We now all get into Jenn's hybrid Ford Escort and drive around Mission Bay and down to the Ocean Beach area where we drive by Todd Bethe's home. We next stop at the beautiful Sunset Cliffs and then on to Point Loma where we explore the Cabrillo Tidal Pools and visit the Point Loma Lighthouse (circa 1851) and the Cabrillo National Monument, all the time enjoying the spectacular views of San Diego across the bay. The weather is a little cloudy but no rain; temperatures in the upper 50s and not very windy.



Next we drive around the bay to Coronado and visit the famous Hotel del Coronado built in 1888. Then we drive by the USS Midway aircraft carrier (served from 1945 through 1975 and now is a waterfront museum), the San Salvador tall ship and several interesting areas in the downtown section.

Now it starts raining and quite heavily at times. Jenn drives us to her nice house for a quick peak before returning us to our hotel at about 2:30PM. We thank Jenn for the great tour and commentary. We were able to see and understand all of the sites that we had planned to see on our own. San Diego is a relatively compact city of 1 million people, but we realize that we would not have been able to accomplish half of what we did today if we had tried to do it on our own.



At 3:30PM we drive to the home of Judi Fenson (Marie and Marcia's cousin) and her husband Larry. We enjoy our next several hours with them. They are true "world travelers" and have visited many of the most exotic and remote areas in the world. We enjoy touring their lovely house and grounds, seeing their many souvenirs and talking about their past and

future travels. We have an excellent dinner at their house. It has continued to rain off and on and we even hear a loud clap of lightning and thunder, which we are told is rare.



We return to our hotel after 9PM. We turn on our computer and see that Jennifer Bethe has sent us a picture of hail on the back of her porch from the passing storm!

Best, Jim

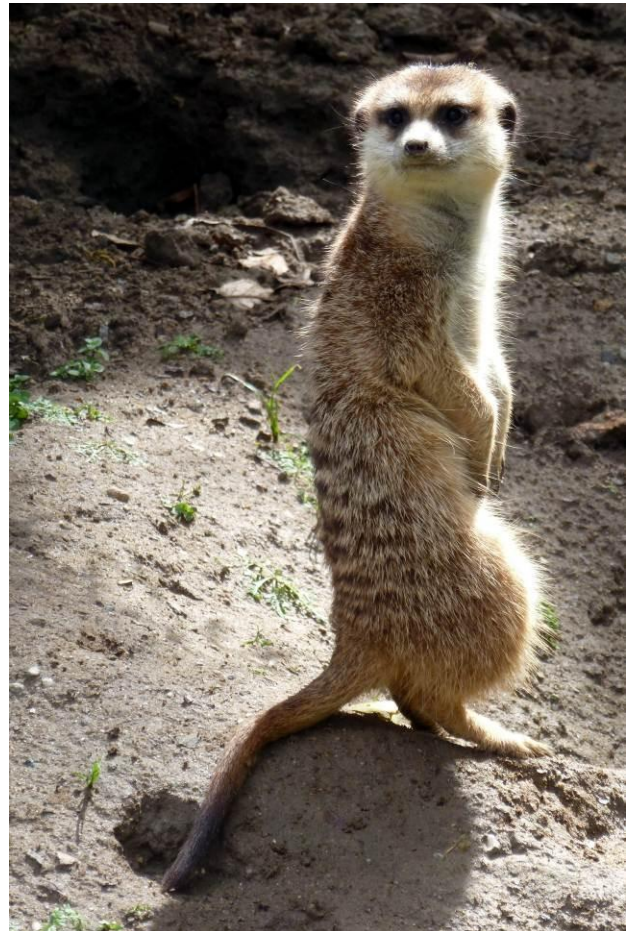
#### **South Pacific Vacation – Day 4 – Tuesday February 28<sup>th</sup>**

Up this morning for our last full day in San Diego at the Best Western Blue Sea.





After breakfast we drive to the “World Famous” San Diego Zoo. We have our \$4 off discount coupons ready and we note that the standard adult ticket is listed for folks up to 59 years in age (\$42). So Kal and I each ask for a “Senior Citizens” ticket and an adult ticket for our wives. We are surprised to find that the difference in the ticket price for us “old codgers” vs. our wives is 20 cents! Anyway we have a great time at the zoo and return to Mission Beach at 2:20PM.



Weather today is clear, but cool for San Diego with highs only in the mid-50s.



At 4PM we drive north to Carlsbad to the home of Judy and Bob St. Austin. Kal has known Bob since 5<sup>th</sup> grade. They were roommates at Ohio State and Kal was the best man at their marriage. He has not seen them in twenty years. Their house is stunning and we enjoy conversation, appetizers and the views of the valley and ocean from their patio. Then off to a Mexican restaurant for dinner and then back to their house for more excellent conversation. We return to Mission Beach at 11PM.



Best, Jim



The St. Austin's front yard visitor – a mother hummingbird on her nest.

**South Pacific Vacation – Day 5 – Wednesday February 29<sup>th</sup>**

Today is our last full day in Southern California prior to our departure for Tahiti. We check out of our hotel on Mission Beach and head north to visit my sister Judy Bethe and her husband John in San Clemente. We get an earlier start than planned, and not wanting to be too early at the Bethe's stop at Mission San Juan Capistrano (circa 1788), home of the famous returning swallows, for a very quick walk through. Weather is sunny and clear with temperatures in the upper 50s.



At 10:30AM the four of us, Marie, Kal, Marcia and Jim arrive at the Bethe's beautiful home in San Clemente. Their two big Akita dogs greet us warmly (as do Judy and John). We tour their home, enjoying the front patio and the view of the ocean off of their back deck. Much great conversation then at noon we all board the Bethe's Chevy SUV and enjoy a driving tour of the pretty downtown area of San Clemente....many neat small shops and nice looking architecture. Next we drive to the beautiful San Clemente pier where the Bethe's treat us to a great lunch on an outdoor restaurant on the pier. After lunch we drive above and through the harbor area. San Clemente is one of the prettiest areas I think that I have ever seen.



Back at the Bethes, John checks the traffic conditions online and gives us route suggestions for our drive to the Los Angeles airport area during the upcoming rush hour. We depart the Bethes at 3:45PM and Kal does his usual good driving job and successfully gets us to our hotel near the airport. Traffic has cooperated and it only takes us 90 minutes...the HOV lane really helps us.





We check in to the Best Western Plus LAX Suites which appears to be a nice hotel. Kal receives a voice-mail from Peggy and Dick Falkenstein, another couple that we will be traveling with to Tahiti, indicating that their flight from North Carolina will be arriving late, so the four of us have an early dinner at a good Mexican restaurant next door to the hotel and retire early.

This concludes our five days in Southern California. This was a wonderful visit. Marcia had never really been in California. The weather was fine and we saw a wide variety of beautiful scenery and architecture. The best part was the friends and family that we visited every day. In each case, one or more of the four of us had never met the folks we were visiting. We always felt welcomed, given great hospitality and enjoyed every minute of our interactions.

Best, Jim

