



Santa Monica Trip Notes
January 9-14, 2015

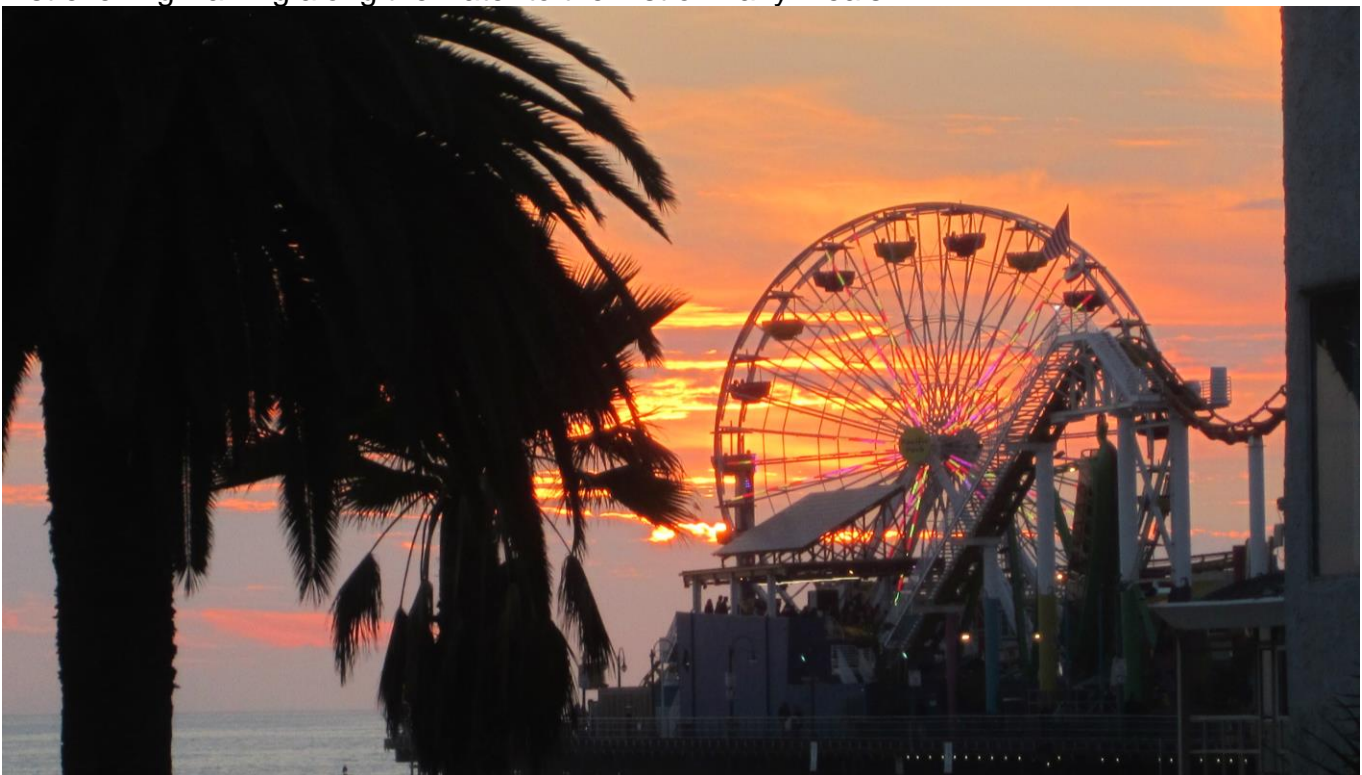
This trip was in honor of Ellen's 80th birthday. Anybody who makes it to 80 deserves a birthday celebration. Even more importantly, Ellen has been a good friend and like a mother to me for so many years that she definitely deserved a birthday celebration and I wanted to be a part of it.

Ellen

Most of my friends have heard about or from Ellen. But for those who do not know her, they may wish they did. She retired as a stockbroker and prior to then raised four kids while getting her education, and then went on to travel more extensively than anyone I know. Better yet, she remembers all of her travels and puts them all together into some logical order and sequence and meaning. With a priority of travel in much of her life she has amazed us with the stories of letting the universe take care of her. Stories like studying the famous illuminated manuscripts and hearing about some new ones being shown off in the boonies of South Africa so off she goes with a maxed out credit card and hoping the universe will get her home. It did. But not without a lot of amazing and adventuresome stories on the way. Anyway, if you don't know Ellen you are getting the idea that she is my kind of hero.

Location Location Location

This didn't hurt either. She lives at the end of the Santa Monica Pier! Here is MY picture from our first evening walking along the water to the first of many meals.



High tea and more high tea

Ellen and I have often discussed special and noteworthy High Tea services around the world and there are quite a number of the top ones in the Los Angeles area. Attending those attached to a museum won out over driving into the city of Los Angeles.

World's 10 Best Spots for Afternoon Tea per Fodors

<http://www.fodors.com/news/photos/worlds-10-best-spots-for-afternoon-tea>

The Getty Villa has a new founder's room with a most delightful tea service. The room is all glass enclosed and looks down into the main courtyard over the fountains and the villa reproduction. The food is amazing and creative. Add a little champagne, a waiter who sings, and you have a real birthday celebration. After Tea we were invited to a culinary garden tour. The guide was so amusing and interesting that we stayed with her despite the heavy rain. Then we stayed with her for the following tour also which was about the architectural highlights.

Huntington Gardens in Pasadena is quite a different picture for their tea service. The food is so much simpler in a buffet in a style of all you can eat. They too offer Champagne, and they too offer a happy birthday desert. We walked the gardens and the museum first and then after Tea did a couple more up of their famous gardens and ended in a more modern museum. It was the Japanese garden in Huntington that first inspired our tea house and was basically copied therefrom. The gardens have grown and expanded dramatically and especially the Chinese gardens as a result of very generous Chinese community. Huntington owns the famous paintings called Pinky and the painting called Blue Boy of which I missed due to renovations at my last visit. They also own pictures of Georgianna, Duchess at Devonshire, plus of her mother, of which history Ellen and I have read extensively. The cactus gardens were in full bloom and rain clean and glistened throughout our walk in the light rain.

The Getty Center is the new center up on the hill. I have been there twice before and I am sure that I would never tire of it and could go days at a time. In lieu of the third tea requiring a drive downtown, we chose to have a notable lunch at the Getty Center. I have done that same restaurant twice before and also with Tom. While I subscribe to the idea that you can never go home again, in this case the restaurant was everything I remembered plus more. They gave us a window seat and a unique menu plus a special honoring plate for Ellen's birthday. I took the 11 o'clock one hour tour of the museum highlights, then hurried back for the 12 o'clock one item focus, then hurried to the 12:30 impressionist guided tour. Following a two hour lunch I join the architectural guided tour. Though I have done that tour at least once and probably twice before, this one gave me new insight into the building. It is truly magnificent and certainly worth a trip just on itself. Here's my favorite sculpture from the Getty Center and as you might guess, it's called "Happy Boy" – probably because he's looking out over Los Angeles?



There's more eating decadence

Three sessions of high tea was not all we consumed: A notable dinner in Santa Monica's restaurant called Seasons 52 is also probably worthy of a trip. That dessert pyramid is noteworthy too and I must include a picture. Then to the opposite extreme we ate at cha-cha chicken, a Caribbean restaurant. It is also a place I would return to but quite the opposite in price and style from Seasons 52.

Other touring with Ellen

On my last trip Ellen took me to the Self-Realization Fellowship Lake Shrine, founded by Paramahansa Yogananda who is someone everyone in the Yoga World knows about (Autobiography of a Yogi) but it was closed so we returned for this trip for a stroll around the lake shrine, the memorial to Gandhi where (some of?) his ashes are, and a fruitful trip to their gift shop where we got a couple CDs of his chanting as well as a big deal singing bowl which I had a challenge getting home. (TSA didn't seem to mind or look twice at my big metal bomb looking affair.)

Then we drove on up into the Malibu Hills to a surprising Hindu temple. It was raining, everyone goes about in bare feet, so imagine our pleasant surprise to find the marble floors heated.



On my own

I needed to give Ellen a free day. She's heavily involved in the politics of Santa Monica and has four efforts ongoing with one needing a speech written. So – I was all ready to take the Hop on – Hop off bus around Santa Monica and Beverly Hills even though I'd done a similar tour before. When I went, it had just departed, so I ate a big hearty and lush fish taco plate instead while waiting for the next bus to arrive. But I missed it too and didn't want to wait another 30 minutes so I continued my many hours of walking through town and when I returned to the bus, it was there waiting for me. Then it came to me: I'd rather walk. So I did.

My hotel was within a mile walk to the Pier and Ellen's home. It was comfortable, gave me a balcony overlooking the water and town, and had I been hungry they too offered a lush buffet breakfast. I did not further indulge.

One evening I had dinner with Sharon and May, friends through marathoning who live nearby. I'd been with them in Jerusalem first, then a few times in between. We ate at a little Italian restaurant with enough left overs for another night's meal. Sharon has done over 600 marathons and travels the world extensively. May is studying for another PhD in French literature and spends part of her year studying at the Sorbonne in Paris.

It took me 50 minutes to get to their restaurant and less than 15 to get home. That's the next story:

Los Angeles traffic

I have been in many places of the world that is said to have extremely bad traffic. I am not sure but what Los Angeles outdoes them all. A 15 minute ride might turn into 50 minutes and this happened to me at least twice. Fortunately I had chosen a nice and larger car. Fortunately I had been forewarned and my friends knew what to expect so they hopefully forgave me my tardiness.

The Birthday celebrations



At Seasons 52 on the Santa Monica waterfront: that is a candle on the top of the pyramid of desserts. Ms. 80th Birthday Gal ate four of them! Next is at the Getty Villa in the Founder's glass enclosed room overlooking the villa. The pyramid had already and pleasantly lost its top selection of food. That was after all the scones and Devonshire cream had been consumed and which eventually put a couple pounds on me.



At the Huntington we did ourselves proud at the buffet tea selections which were all lush and unique. Then at the Getty Center and a favorite restaurant, here is Ellen with bouillabaisse and a final gorgeous plate that says "Happy 80th Birthday". She says she has mixed emotions about being 80. She shouldn't as she still has the 'inner child' that comes across all the time as she fully enjoys life, makes the best of it, and never seems 80.

The End

Not the least but the end of the eating extravaganza and hopefully the end to my extra pounds but maybe not since I leave to Florence for 10 days shortly after.

Itinerary

Fri Jan 9

8:30am Depart Newark EWR via UA#1455
11:25am Arrive Los Angeles LAX

Rental car

Hotel Le Meridien Delfina Santa Monica – 5 nights
530 Pico Boulevard, Santa Monica, 90405 Tele 310 399 9344
<http://www.limeridiendelfina.com/en/limeridien>

Dinner With Ellen at Seasons 52

Sat Jan 10

9:00am Self-Realization Fellowship Lake Shrine - Paramahansa Yogananda the founder
10:00am Founder's birthday meditation at the temple on the hill

Onto Hindu temple in Malibu Hills

1:00pm High Tea at Getty Villa

Sun Jan 11

10:30am Huntington Gardens

1:00pm High Tea at Huntington Gardens

Mon Jan 12

Eve Dinner with Sharon and May

Tue Jan 13

1:00pm Lunch reservations at Getty Center

Wed Jan 14

1:00pm Depart Los Angeles LAX via UA#1117
9:17pm Arrive Newark EWR