

## Los Angeles 2012

### Farmers Market/La Brea Tar Pit

On our first day we decided to take a hop-on-hop-off bus tour to get the lay of the land. As we walked from the hotel to the Mann's Chinese Theatre, we saw posters of Charlise Theron looking stunning in "The Huntsman".

The bus tour gave us commentary about actors and actresses who were famous decades ago. We eventually hopped off at the Farmers Market and really enjoyed browsing that quaint shopping area and had lunch at a French outdoor restaurant. There was a large Barnes and Noble bookstore so Keeb did some damage there.

Back on the bus, we drove past the La Brea Tar Pit. One thing about the pit, you know you are near it long before you see it because it smells so strongly of molten tar. This pit was so tiny compared to our pitch lake but was interesting as there were reproductions of mastodons in active poses around the pit. Clearly, we need to jazz up our pitch lake since ours looks like a giant car park to the uninitiated.

### Mann's Chinese Theatre

Our hotel was a short walk from Mann's Chinese Theatre, and we were fascinated by the costumed characters that congregated there. When we boarded the bus tour Keeb yelled out "Spidey!" and I was surprised that Spiderman yelled back to him.

We came across a dead ringer for Samuel Jackson to whom Keeb asked "What do you call a big Mac in France?" Not only did he reply "Royal with cheese" he went on with the speech.

### 1984 Play

We were impressed by the play 1984 which was directed by Tim Robbins. It took the form of an interrogation of Winston Smith by four Party members and the story unfolded through his answers to the inquisition. The Party members also played the roles of Julia and O'Brian. We were intrigued by the Spanish surtitles being projected as there did not appear to be any Spanish speaking audience members, but it became clear in the intermission when Tim Robbins explained that they had taken the play to Colombia. Keeb, ever fearless, asked Tim Robbins if we could get a photo with him but he declined as he did not want to start a whole photo frenzy. We continued chatting and Keeb told him we had come all the way from Trinidad.

When the second act was about to begin, the lobby emptied and as Keeb and I were making our way back, Tim called us back and said we could get our picture now. Keeb was about to take it but Tim's assistant offered to take it so Keeb could be in the photo. What we have is the world blurriest photograph as I did not have my flash on. Our photo feels like it was taken from the wobbly wheel in the opening scene of "Jacob's Ladder". See what I did there with that movie reference?

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The theatre in which the play was staged was called "The Actors Gang" and they teach theatre arts to at-risk youth and prisoners which I thought was an excellent project. It was not clear if any of the performers we saw that night had been incarcerated. Keeb did not think so.

### South Bay Ballet's Cinderella

To balance out the grimness of 1984 I had booked us to see Cinderella as a ballet. At the time I did not realise it was being performed by a ballet school but the performance was polished considering how young the performers were.

### Warner Brother's Studio Tour

I did some net-based research regarding studio tours and gleaned that the Warner Brother's VIP (small group) tour was better than the equivalent Universal Studios and cost a fraction of Universal's. I had done the Universal tour with Mum almost ten years ago and remembered several rides which I was pretty sure Keeb would not find interesting. So we booked online and headed up to the Warner Brothers studio. The start of the tour was a short video of their most famous films and TV shows which included Harry Potter, Matrix, Batman, Big Bang Theory and Friends. We were then ferried around the lot to see the facades and practical sets of past and present TV shows with many references to "Pretty Little Liars" which were completely lost on me. The highlights for me were the Friends related tidbits including the house with the staircase Ross stood on in the episode when he thought he was taking Rachel to the prom and also the grassy area where Phoebe runs wildly around which was supposed to be Central Park. We also got to visit the set on which Big Bang Theory is shot. I was particularly pleased to see the out-of-order elevator. We then visited the Harry Potter museum with lots of costumes, a maquette of Dobby and my favourite – the Dursley's fireplace from which poured all those Hogwarts letters in the first movie. The one part of the tour that I was not so impressed with was seeing the actual filming of a scene in an upcoming movie. Both Scarlett Johansson and Julian Moore are in the movie but neither one was present for the scene we watched being shot over and over again – a woman crosses a street... Big wup.

We ended the tour by seeing the studio's famous vehicles and while I appreciated seeing the Bat mobile from "Batman Forever" and the vehicle from Matrix, the one I really liked was a beat-up, turquoise Ford Anglier that was the worse for wear having been pummelled by a Whomping Willow. Although the Hogwarts Express was not there (if you have been following my trip reports you would know it's on display at the National Railway museum in York), we did get a photo of us in front of the Express courtesy of movie magic.

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### Conan O'Brien Taping

A few weeks before our trip I requested tickets to see the taping of one of Conan O'Brien's shows but Keeb did not hold out any hope that we would actually get them. Well, they e-mailed back saying we were in and a week before Team Coco called to confirm we would be attending. Now, as we had toured Warner Brothers' Studios already we had a basic idea of where to go but were a bit surprised when our taxi turned into Gate 8 and it turned out to be a covered parking lot. Especially as the security guard told us that we only needed to have our IDs verified so not to let our friend leave. Our taxi was by then was already tearing out of the parking lot. We were verified and had the backs of our hands stamped and told we had three hours before we were to be taken over to the studio. When we asked if there were any restaurants nearby we were assured we were in an "industrial wasteland" but sitting around the car park did not appeal to us so Keeb chose a direction and we struck out on foot. Twenty minutes later we came upon the Smoke House restaurant which hearkened back to a bygone era. We had a leisurely lunch there which was pretty good. When we returned to Gate 8 Keeb mentioned the restaurant to the security guard who replied "I told you there was nothing nearby!" – Americans, you gotta love them. Apparently a 20 minute walk is too far.

We were then issued tickets and wristbands (in addition to the stamps we received on having our IDs verified). Then we were herded across the road to the studios – we were allowed to enter only after our hand stamps were checked by another security guard. We were then left in a pen-like structure for about 45 minutes but this was okay as they were playing a previously taped Conan show for our entertainment. We were then taken to the studio and the security guard at the door was looking at wristbands only. Much to both his and my surprise, I was no longer wearing my wristband. He radioed for backup saying "We have one here without a wristband". After all those checks I was crestfallen to think we would not get in but a woman came over, looked me up and down and said to let me in. Once in the studio we enjoyed the show very much. To Keeb's delight Charlise Theron was the main guest talking about her new movie "Prometheus" – a prequel to the "Alien" series. I loved her shoes. She was very charming and self deprecating. The music guest was a Canadian band called... Bahamas. Of course, what else would a Canadian band call themselves?

After the show Conan came up to the row in front of ours to hug a fan who had brought a poster asking for the hug. so we got to see him up close. He is really tall. Then Tig Notaro took the stage and did a stand-up routine. She was testing her material out on the audience and although we had never heard of her at that point, we liked her laid back style. Years later, she went on to play the funniest character on Star Trek Discovery.

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### **Santa Monica Pier and Venice Beach**

Ty advised us to go to Venice Beach – something about the freaks that congregate there. Well, everyone seemed normal to me so maybe my freak filter has a different setting. There were a lot of shops and the front of one had a contemporary mural inspired by Botticelli's "Birth of Venus". We enjoyed browsing in the Small World Bookshop along the beach. I thought the selection of books was eclectic. We had a delicious organic lunch at an outdoor restaurant called Figtrees. I must say California really does have good, healthy food.

We then walked from Venice Beach to Santa Monica Pier and stopped at the famed Muscle Beach on the way.

At the pier, I wanted to see the vintage merry go round and as we peered at it through the window of the building housing it, Keeb pronounced it Bradburyesque and I agreed. He was thinking of the opening of Ray Bradbury's television show and I was thinking of Ray's "Something Wicked This Way Comes" which featured a carousel that ran backwards in time so people would become younger when they rode it. I have loved Ray Bradbury's books and found out afterwards that he passed away the day before we were talking about him on the pier.

### **Food**

We ate well in Los Angeles, in addition to Figtrees, the French restaurant in the Farmer's market and the Smoke House we also had an interesting Japanese meal at Koji's Japan called shabu shabu, where we cooked our food in pots of boiling broth on our table. Keeb asked if we still had to pay them considering we were doing the work!