

FROM THE SHORTEST DAY TO THE LONGEST DAY

Our travel this year takes us from the shortest day to the longest day – in one flight! One friend queried how then, would I be able to grow my garlic (*old gardening adage, plant on the shortest day - harvest on the longest day*). We are heading to the Rotary International World Convention again. I see some readers are not surprised!

This one is in the Toronto, Canada, and we are told, is the 5th such Rotary event to be held in that city. But we have to get there first! It may be the shortest day but we get out of Napier in reasonable winter weather and then on to Auckland where we board our international flight to Vancouver. On time we pull away from the air bridge and travel several metres before coming to a stop and a captain's announcement that we must return to the air bridge so that an "Engineer" can have 20 minutes to check some technical problem. The time turns into 30 minutes and then a request to leave the aircraft for 1 ½ hours to allow full examination. Back in the terminal with a supplied food voucher, I find, by turning my phone back on, that Air NZ text quite frequently extending the "examination time" until it turns into something like 4 ½ hours and we depart at around 12.45am!

What would have been a good meal time of around 9pm and then a sleep, turns into a less interesting one at 2am with sleep attempted around 3am. Needless to say we awake quite early, though it is well into day time in the northern hemisphere and we finally reach Vancouver around four hours late. Fellow Rotarians travelling with us miss their connecting flights on to Toronto though are rebooked as we fly but now they arrive at their destination in the day time and miss their night's accommodation that they had booked. We, on the other hand, had decided to "pace ourselves" and had booked a night in Vancouver before flying on. As you can see our decision turned out to be a very wise one.

Out of the Vancouver airport we quickly find the required shuttle bus to our "Airport Hotel" and board it for the quick trip to our room. It takes

15 – 20 minutes and were I at home in Napier, it would be like leaving the Napier Airport and driving nearly to Hastings to reach the hotel! It matters little and all we need is a bed. Even food is of no interest for it seems only short time since we ate breakfast on the plane – and now it is evening. We book an early morning call and go to bed. Allowing for the travel time, we go without breakfast, get the shuttle, make the airport, do a "self-check-in" and find our flight is cancelled! We are however, automatically rebooked on another plane, on the same airline and that leaves at exactly the same time! We make our way to the departure gate, grabbing something to eat as we pass a café.

Boarding the plane, we become slightly separated in the air bridge and then move to our seats. I wonder why Eleanor does not stop at row 20 but continues on to row 23, only to discover that in the re-booking we each have a window seat, but three rows apart! Added to the drama is the fact that I am holding the money (that I think you need to buy food on this airline) and Eleanor has the morning tablets that we need to take with the breakfast that we have hardly had time to gobble. We wave to each other and settle down for the trip. I felt there should be a food menu in the seat pocket to show what you buy if you wanted to – but I could not find one. I sought to get advice from the people in my row but they were a young couple who had fallen asleep, her with her head on his shoulder initially, but eventually she collapsed into his lap and had her head – there! I took this no further.

I watched the food trolley go past, then realised that I could get a coffee for free so had that – and hoped Eleanor did the same. A few hours later, when it returned I decided I would do a purchase so got the steward to pass a menu across to me and I made a quick choice of a pack of nuts and chocolate. Then as he passed the card machine, I changed the order to two packs and asked him to give one to the lady in 23F. He agreed and dashed down the plane to eventually locate

Eleanor waving to him. Overjoyed at this success, I opened my bag (with a degree of difficulty) and consumed the contents – hoping Eleanor was enjoying hers. She was not! She could not open the bag and did not like to ask the people sitting in her row as they spoke a foreign language. We ate those nuts the next day.

There do not seem to be any ear plugs so I cannot watch a movie. People around me seem to have their own rather large headphones. I watch the “Flight” channel but then it shows “no navigation information available.” I hope the pilot has better information than this. All I can see is cloud – and then it lifts and I can see ocean – in the middle of the continent!! We are surely lost. Then I realise we are crossing the Great Lakes – and begin our ascent.

We reach Toronto on time and I know things must get better. They don't. Retrieving our bags we move to the “very convenient” Rotary Booth right there in the terminal where we can verify our convention registration and uplift our name tags to identify ourselves for the coming week. There are “Rotary People” throughout the complex providing help and advice. One tells us where to catch the train into the city and another tells us there are “hotel shuttles” at a certain gate and down a few levels. Since this would take us right to the door we opt for that.

Going through several levels we finally find the shuttle park and it transpires that they handle only the “Airport Hotels” not Downtown which we want. We retrace our steps through the levels, remonstrate with “Rotary Guides” over their advice, get swamped by a group of Asians and ousted from a lift that they take over and finally find the train. After a long queue I manage to handle buying the tickets (a total of \$12) from a machine – even obtaining the “senior rate” and boarding the train into the city. Out of the train station and into an extremely large city we eventually locate a taxi rank and get a cab to our hotel – for \$8. That's better than \$50 - \$60 (and perhaps double as it is rush hour) had we got one at the airport.

We settle into our hotel, a rather smart one only a few blocks from the convention centre and will later have a Rotary bus that takes us from door to door. Dinner at a nearby restaurant, and a glass of chardonnay sets us up for a good night's sleep. The next morning we are slow risers but buy tickets at the hotel, eventually get out into the streets and make our way to the nearest Bus Stop for the *Hop on – Hop Off* bus. Actually it is not the *nearest* stop for we walked a few blocks in the wrong direction to begin with! Eventually joining the bus, we gain a seat on the top deck and then wonder if that was a good idea because of the cold first, and then the sun. We ride the city, see the sites, do a provided harbour cruise (it's getting quite cold now and we sit inside) before making our way back to our hotel, rather tired campers – even with some sunburn!

Sunday sees us up early and we head to the Convention area, at first the official opening of the “*House of Friendship*” where all the Rotary Stalls and Rotary Bling Shops are located. I attend the International Travel & Hosting Fellowship meeting of the board that I belong to, and then do a spell on the “promotion booth” for that group while Eleanor returns to the hotel to rest. In the evening we go to the CN Tower (553m) for the Fellowship Dinner with special instructions to be in the “security area” by 6pm. Crowded in, we get checked over and finally make our way the restaurant to partake in a “very expensive” dinner (that we had fortunately pre-paid). We reach the top to discover that the previous diners are still finishing their meals and we remain packed into a foyer for about 30 minutes before finally reaching our tables. Then we have a glorious view of the city, or would have were we not up above the clouds! It does clear on occasions though and we get a brief glimpse of the city below.

Reaching our bed late at night we seek to catch-up on our sleep patterns at last and reckon it must get better from here! And - I must get some photos!