

We were up and on the road soon after 8am this morning to catch our lunchtime flight from Las Vegas to San Francisco. The drive down to Las Vegas was under 3 hours, but we wanted to leave plenty time for queues at the rental car drop off and airport security. The first part of the drive was through beautiful canyon country, the second part was through the Mojave Desert, which isn't exactly the most scenic place we've been. Our drive took us through Utah, Arizona and then back into Nevada.

We made one quick stop at the Las Vegas Speedway, to find a Nevada geocache. We wanted to get at least one in each state we visited and hadn't found any during our Las Vegas stay. We had expected to do a lot more geocaching than we have done. We have either been too busy or have been in National Parks where caches are usually not allowed. The kids loved seeing all the familiar crazy things in Vegas on the drive to the rental car centre.

Our fears of rental car drop off queues were unfounded. That place is a well oiled machine and we were on a shuttle to the airport very quickly. Even the security queues at the airport were short (especially compared with San Francisco) and somehow we got special approval that exempted us from removing our shoes, belts etc. It looked as if our flight was on time and everyone had boarded, when they realised that the ground staff had forgotten to load the catering carts onto the plane. I'm sure most passengers would have happily departed minus the carts and sacrificed the one drink they received, but the rules were no carts, no departure. We sat on the tarmac for an extra 45 minutes before the essential carts finally arrived.

The pilot did his best to make up time, but we still arrived half an hour late. Once we were off the plane, things went pretty smoothly. We caught the BART (Bay Area Rapid Transport) to the city and walked a couple of blocks to the Hotel Nikko. After a quick rest, we set off in search of food to The Cheesecake Factory on the top floor of Macys. We thought it would be quiet at 5:30pm, but there was a 20 minute wait. Americans eat so early, especially compared with Europeans.

We ended up with an outdoor table looking out over Union Square. With patio heaters to keep us toasty, it was a magic spot to sit for dinner. The Cheesecake Factory started out serving cheesecake, but has branched out since then - the menu was 21 pages! The food was delicious and it was lovely to look down on all the Christmas decorations and the outdoor ice skating rink below. It was easily voted best meal of the trip so far. After dinner Andy took the kids down to see the nearby cable car turnaround and I did some shopping in Macys. It was only a two minute walk back to the hotel and felt perfectly safe with lots of people around.





Chicken Salad - Cheesecake Factory style - no small servings here

It is great to be back in San Francisco again. It's 8 years since we were here with little kids, it's amazing how much they have grown up since then. Although we were pretty sad to say goodbye to the South West this morning, I'm sure that San Francisco will be a great trip finale.