



June 13, 2015

Fellow Traveler,

Las Vegas-- A former girlfriend used to work in Las Vegas, so I've spent quite a bit of time there. But I hadn't been to Vegas for several years until friends invited me to join them at the [Wynn](#) over this past Memorial Day Weekend, and I have to say, I was surprised at how pleasant that hotel-casino property is. And given the size of the place, the service was most impressive.

I'd last stayed at the Wynn ten years ago, but this time I booked a room in the resort's newer tower called Encore. The room could have been a Four Seasons room, but not *quite* a [Mandarin Oriental](#) room, which is *the* place to stay in the CityCenter complex if you want quiet luxury in the midst of Strip madness.

I know there are travelers who hate Vegas. But I like to say "it's so bad, it's good." By that I mean it's so over the top, it works. Whether you're talking restaurants, signage, spas, gambling floors, or simply visitors, almost all things Vegas are larger than life.

This, after all, is a place where top DJs earn \$300,000 for a few hours of spinning records in mega-clubs that can bring in a million dollars a night. (For fun, read this 2013 *New Yorker* [article on Vegas nightclubs](#) for details on that unusual world.) Magicians make elephants disappear, [Guy Savoy](#) at Caesar's Palace sometimes outdoes his Paris eatery (try the artichoke and black truffle soup), and one of the [best Thai restaurants](#) in town is tucked inside a drab strip mall.



Steve Wynn has always sprinkled art by big names around his properties--remember his mini-art gallery at the Bellagio when he owned it, with its walls adorned with works by Monet, Rembrandt, and Warhol? At the Wynn, you can't miss these gigantic, "high chromium, stainless steel" tulips by Jeff Koons in the middle of an intersection of wide hallways. They may not look it in my photo, but, trust me, they're BIG tulips!

There's the [Ferrari dealership](#) on the ground floor of Wynn in case you have an unusually big win one night. It costs \$10 to enter the showroom to ogle the cars on display though Ferrari owners don't have to pay admission. I encountered one, a Mr. Dennison from Cleveland with his dear friend, Miami model Sierra, who look like they deserve to be in a Ferrari at all times. And, yes, there's a massage therapist 24/7 on the floor of the poker room should your neck muscles tighten up during play.



Vegas vies with Orlando as America's most-visited destination, and while I've been disconsolate since the Liberace Museum



closed a few years ago, there are still reasons to visit. A few of my favorite things: hiking nearby [Red Rock Canyon](#), catching a Cirque du Soleil show, and visiting the [Neon Museum](#) where the outdoor "Boneyard" features a collection of iconic neon signs from old Vegas. Take lots of water and hike early in the day if you're going to do Red Rock. And of course you can get married in the Boneyard amidst the signs of yesteryear--it's Vegas, baby!

--Rudy

Odd lots . . .

Quick stuff you need to know. Well, maybe . . .

- Spotify, the on-line music service, launched today a **playlist for runners** that chooses music timed to your pace. Here's a 52-second, [illustrative video](#) . . .
- ApplePay announces you'll soon be able to use it to **pay for rides on London buses and the Tube**. (London buses no longer accept cash.) I don't know--and Apple didn't say--if you can load the equivalent of Oyster card fares into ApplePay. You'll always realize significant savings if you use an Oyster card (available at any Tube station) to pay fares for public transport in London . . .
- If you're an AARP member (and the secret is, you don't have to be a senior citizen to be a member), you can **save up to \$400 on British Airways flights if you book before the end of October**. The \$400 is off business or first-class tickets; it's \$65 off coach, \$130 off premium economy. Details [here](#) . . .
- A couple of weeks ago, employees of the Eiffel Tower walked off the job in protest of the number of pickpockets gangs working the crowds there. This is nothing new, and **if you're headed to Paris or even London or Rome, it's tourist, beware**. I've only been pick pocketed once in Paris, at a flea market while wearing a winter coat with (stupidly) my passport in an outside pocket. A child could have lifted it, and in fact a child may have--in 2013, a mastermind of a ring of pickpockets was accused of threatening 500 Roma girls with beatings or rape if they didn't steal \$400 a day. **One popular scam today involves a group of children asking you to sign a petition while you're withdrawing money from an ATM. And the Metro is a hotbed of pickpockets**. Check out a 99-cent app called [BeSafe](#) that identifies pickpocket hotspots in Paris, London, and New York.

■ Travel to Mexico often? **The country has launched a "trusted travel program"** that's similar to our Global Entry offering that let's you bypass immigration lines. Three airports offer it today--Mexico City, San Jose del Cabo and Cancun--but 10 more will be operative soon. Here's [more info](#) and the application . . .

■ There's been a spate of events this year marking the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe. If you're visiting Berlin, there's a moving [exhibit](#) at the German Historical Museum that's worth your attention through Oct. 25th. **The focus is on life in war-torn Europe immediately following Germany's surrender** as seen through the story of 36 people, some as well-known as Lord Mountbatten and others unknown except to their families. Using letters, ration coupons, physical mementos, and photos, the exhibit vividly displays the hopes, fears, and devastation faced by survivors right after the war. Even if you don't go, check out this [startling video of Berlin](#) right after the war; it's amazing there's still a city there.



Where I'm eating in LA now . . .

Three new places: a seafood restaurant in Marina del Rey; a favorite chef opens in Hollywood; and what might be LA's best (new) restaurant in the "new-old" downtown . . .

■ An inventive Peruvian restaurant called Pieche in Marina Del Ray on Maxella Avenue just off Lincoln Boulevard shut down one day after its chef, Ricardo Zarata, seemingly disappeared. **A month ago, with a minimum of changes in interior design, [Catch & Release](#) was born, and it's happy thing.** As the name suggests, it's mostly about seafood, and it's overseen by chef [Jason Neroni](#) who has a distinguished pedigree. Don't miss the "freckled little gems salad" punctuated with white anchovies and the Bay scallops on the half shell



with ramps and sweet cucumber sauce. A pot of mixed seafood in a lovely sauce was a better choice, I thought, than the soft-shell crab that was overdressed. Bonus points if your can snare Uzbekistan-born, USC-educated Mariya ("Maria") as your server.

■ For years, Waterloo & City was my favorite Culver City restaurant for honest, full-plated dinners from the kitchen of British chef Brendan Collins (photo, below, from Los Angeles Magazine). His whole, roast chicken studded with under-the-skin garlic was the ultimate comfort dish. When it closed down, I mourned. **Fortunately, Collins has opened a new place in the middle of Tourist Central in Hollywood. But don't let that deter you,** because [Birch](#) is another serious restaurant to which attention must be paid. The house specialty is pork shank (below) cooked in palm sugar and served with fermented coleslaw. Take the meat and wrap it with the slaw in the accompanying flatbread; one order is enough for



three diners. The rabbit baklava with Bing cherries is a crowd pleaser as is the grilled lamb belly and summer corn with truffle mascarpone. The open-to-the-street eatery is small, so book ahead. Oh, as befits an

English chef, the sticky toffee pudding rivals any I've had in London.



■ Then there's [Red Bird](#), the newest restaurant by chef Neal Fraser whose Grace restaurant I always enjoyed. But Red Bird is, pardon me, a bird of a different feather. The name comes for its location, in the chancery of a deconsecrated cathedral, St. Vibianis, in the new/old (and hip) downtown LA, and "red bird" refers to a Catholic cardinal's mitre. **LA Times** dining critic **Jonathan Gold** called Red Bird the "**most anticipated new LA restaurant of the current decade,**" and it was worth the wait.

If there are two or three of you, order the 24-ounce veal chop or or 32-ounce Colorado Porterhouse. But even the smoked tofu with black truffle is a taste triumph. And the *pommes aligot* is a festival of creamy potato and butter that may compel you to ask forgiveness from the diet gods for inhaling. You can eat in a first room, but ask for the main dining room that is a patio that now boasts a roof that opens to the sky (above). If you'd like to read more about the cuisine, check out Mr. Gold's Apr. 3rd, enthusiastic [review](#).



Footnote: I can't resist squeezing in one more recommendation. If you're headed to the beach, Manhattan Beach in particular, try the very interesting Asia restaurant called [Little Sister](#) with a minimalist decor. The cement walls and worn-wood floors ramp up the noise level (even the home page of the website is noisy), and the service stuttered on our first visit, but when the food arrived, our moods improved. The website [menu](#) is out of date as of this writing, but it'll give you an idea of the interesting combinations of small plates that can create a feast. Parking in the beach town, even on a Sunday night, can be difficult, so set aside 10 minutes to find a legal spot as there's no valet parking.

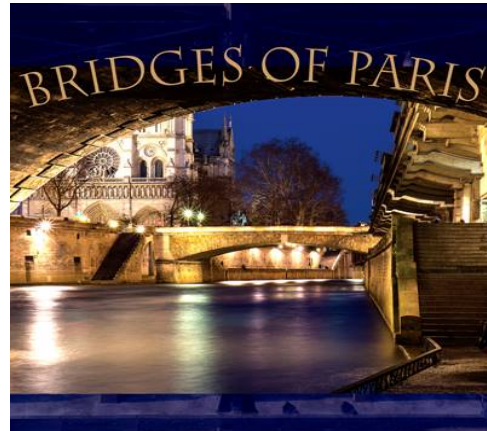


Short Travel Takes . . .

■ **Don't get burned crossing the Golden Gate Bridge in a rental car:** The toll booth workers at San Francisco's most iconic bridge were laid off long ago. If you don't have an EZPass or FasTrack transponder in your rental car (that you must rent by the day), you'll get a very stiff bill in the mail weeks after returning your car. So if you're only going to cross the bridge once or twice while visiting, you should pre-pay

your \$7 toll at [this site](#). Or pay at that site within 48 hours of crossing. Remember, you only pay *coming into San Francisco*, so you'll only need to pay one toll for a round trip . . .

■ Speaking of bridges, I'm sure you followed the news when Parisian authorities decided they had to call a halt to the trend of lovers clasp padlocks to the bridges of Paris as a sign of their everlasting affection. The tons of locks were in danger of damaging the sides of those bridges. Author **Michael Saint James** spent a year photographing the 37 bridges that cross the Seine in Paris, and the result is a gorgeous, coffee-table book titled [Bridges of Paris](#). It makes a wonderful hostess gift or would look good on *your* coffee table. Michael tells me folks have taken to affixing locks all over Paris now that the bridges are off limits. . .



■ **Argentiniens are most likely to steal**

stuff from hotel rooms (not including toiletries that hotels expect and even hope you take home), according to a [survey of 5,000 worldwide travelers](#) by Hotels.com. Fifty three percent of Americans admit to stealing items such as pens, towels, and slippers while 73% of Argentines and 71% of Singaporeans plead guilty. Though not as guilty as the couple who backed a U-Haul trailer close to their American Holiday Inn room and loaded it up with all their room's furniture.



Deals & More



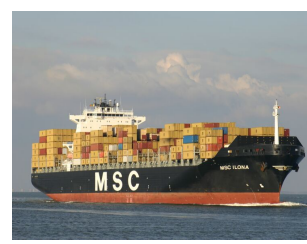
Upcoming Devaluation Of Amex Points For British Airways & Iberia Points

Points Update: Membership Reward points earned by American Express cardholders can be traded for a wide variety of airline miles, hotel frequent



Fido Coast-to-Coast New Comfort Class For Pets Aboard AA

Credit Paris Hilton and her recently deceased Chihuahua, Tinkerbell, for American Airline's new perk for pets on

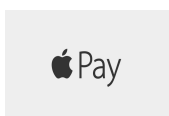


Deals: Freighter Cruise From Europe to US; Last-Minute Cabins

If you've ever considered a cruise aboard a working freighter ship, the **MSC Ilona** (pictured above)

guest points, and all kinds of other goods and services.

But if you've been husbanding your Amex points for later use toward British Airways or Iberia flights, you should cash in those Amex points before Oct. 1st. That's when Amex will change the rules. **You'll have to redeem 1,250 Amex points to receive 1,000 BA or Iberia Avios points. In other words, no more 1:1 exchange rate.** Avoid that devaluation by acting before that deadline.



Apple News:

You may know that London buses don't accept cash—you

need to use an Oyster card (that you buy in London) that is also handy for the Tube (and is MUCH cheaper than buying individual tickets). This week Apple announced Apple Pay will debut in London shortly, as well, making it easier for visitors to take public transportation by just waving their phone at a turnstile.

trans-con flights.

On AA's new Airbus A321T that flies between LA and JFK (13 times a day) and JFK and San Francisco (five times a day) there are **two, ventilated pet cabins for stowing pets during takeoff and landings.**

While passengers may fly with their pet carrier, pets must be stowed in the special cabins when the flight is ascending or descending.

has five, last-minute departures from Europe to NYC late this month. And the MSC Flaminia has (at this writing) one double cabin from Genoa to NYC (via Valencia and Algeciras) on June 23rd. There's a 10% reduction in price as an incentive. Call Miri Lopusna at The Cruise People Ltd in London on (44) 20 7723 2450 or e-mail cruisepeopleltd@aol.com. You can see sailing dates [here](#).

Sammy Haggard joins me on the radio show to reveal his "Places of the Heart," where he goes to relax. Listen live to "Rudy Maxa's World" using [this link](#)



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