

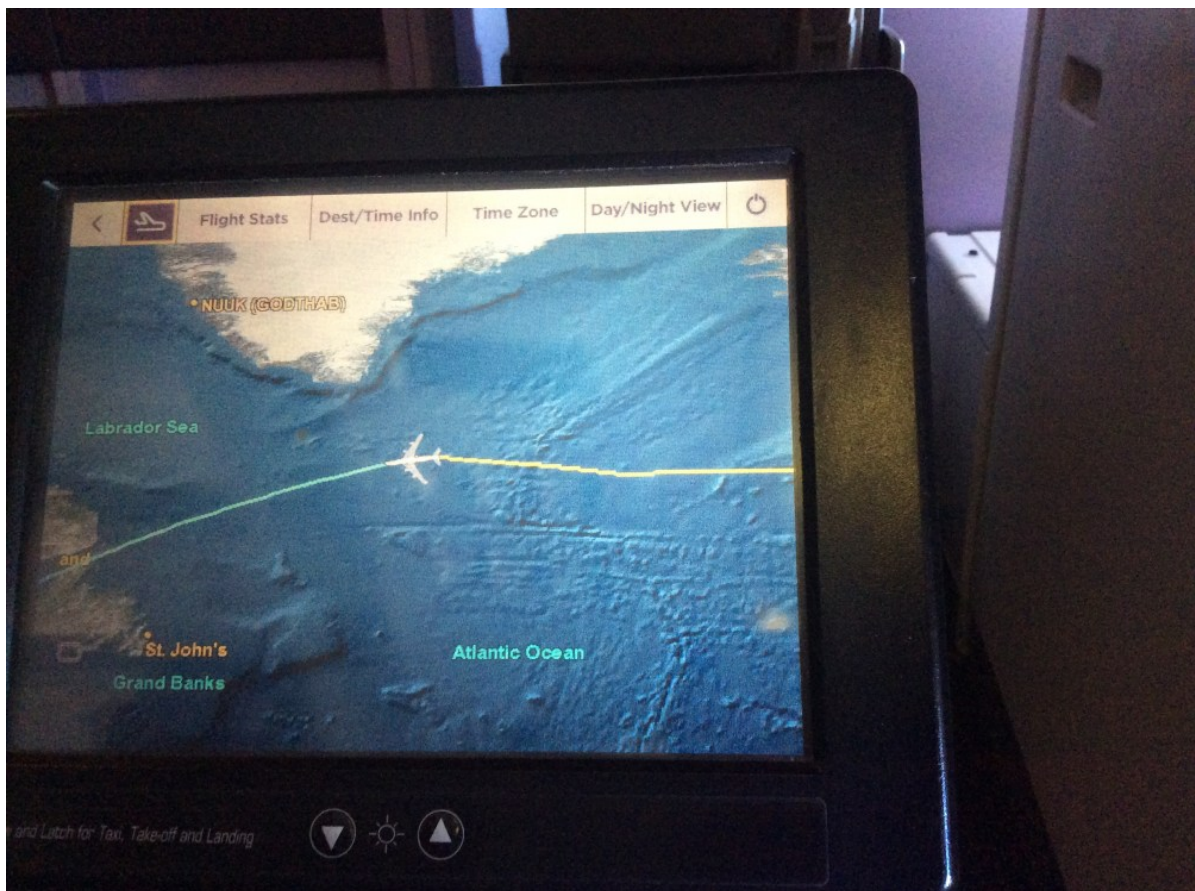
American adventures on Amtrak- Part 1, London – New York

Wednesday 5th Aug

We are currently travelling at 35,000ft above the Atlantic Ocean, somewhere in between UK and USA on the top floor of a Virgin Atlantic Jumbo Jet! After 18 months of waiting, planning and looking forward to, we are finally on our honeymoon- a trip that will take us from New York to San Fransisco over the period of 3.5 weeks. Most people we have told about this trip have assumed that we will be hiring an RV to make the trip, and this was

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something that we certainly thought about, but the thought of driving the entire width of America seemed a little bit tiring, so we've opted for an organised tour, with Great Rail and will be travelling via train, once we land that is!



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In true Keith and Lydia style, we decided to travel to London a day early, in order to do a bit of sightseeing before we headed to the Airport, Wednesday morning. So yesterday, Tuesday, we said our farewells to Jazz, who is staying with my mum and stepdad, and

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jumped aboard our first of many train journeys- Newark Northgate to London Kings Cross.



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The weather was good so we decided to head towards the Shard however, sadly, when we arrived it was midst evacuation (there had been a small oven fire in one of the restaurant kitchens!) so those hopes were dashed. We regrouped at a nearby Thameside pub, and feeling inspired by all the boats travelling up and down the river, decided to take a boat trip to Greenwich Village as neither of us had done that previously.

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We walked across Tower Bridge, enjoying watching the bridge lift to let a boat through, and towards Tower Pier, where CityCruises operate from. Whilst booking on to the next departing boat, I showed our National rail tickets and we were given a hefty discount- worth remembering if you ever are down

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there. The tour itself was fab, the commentary was very amusing and delivered by a broad cockney lad- who made us smile with his anecdotes and stories.



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Once in Greenwich, we decided to have a quick trip to the The National Maritime Museum (free), somewhere that's been on our list for quite a while. It was a flying visit really, but we enjoyed it nonetheless, particularly the 2nd floor which was home to the Nelson Exhibition, and also had Nelson's uniform he was

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wearing when he was killed during the Battle of Trafalgar- you could even see the hole in his jacket that killed him. We took our return journey to the city via boat and once on dry land headed to Covent Garden, where we met for a quick beer with one of a Keith's oldest friends. Our evening then was spent taking in the street life from a few pubs, rounded off by a curry at our old favourite, The Strand Tandoori.

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We awoke nice and early, super excited that departure day was finally here. We made our way across London to Heathrow ready to meet our Tour Manager, John, at 10:30.

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After a quick hello, he assisted us with check in and sent us on our way, until we meet again at JFK. We decided to upgrade our seats to exit doors on the upstairs level, so

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we got maximum leg room (Keith's 6ft4 so it's a nice treat for him) but the main reason was because we couldn't get any seats together otherwise. We felt it was a worthy upgrade though, it's so spacious up here- it's wonderful to be able to stretch out, plus, we are getting served first, AND we are right next to first class, which is great for people watching! So far (3.5hrs in) we are talking about doing the same for the return journey.

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I'm a nervous flyer, but the staff at Virgin couldn't have done more to put me at ease during take off, the steward told me stories to distract me which was so nice of her, and worked a treat (first time in years I've not blubbed- Hurrah!) As soon as the seatbelt sign was off, we were asked what we wanted to drink (complementary) and so we've enjoyed a couple of gins each along with pretzels, a glass of wine with our tasty in

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flight meal (bean salad to start, I had chicken curry, K had pulled beef, Gu desert and cheese and crackers) and I've just been given a "Fab"- never had an ice lolly on a flight before!! Apparently next up is "afternoon tea"- I'm loving all this food!!

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We touched down at JFK on smoothly and on time, and within 45 mins our entire group (30 people) had gone through security, customs, got our bags and we're headed to the awaiting coach to take us to Manhattan, a 90 min transfer. Our tour manager John, offered interesting commentary along the way and it's safe to say Keith and I were bubbling with excitement as we saw our first yellow cabs, and yellow school bus, both iconic American sights in our eyes!

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The hotel, The Sheraton Times Square, is A.-MAZ.ING! Hands down the poshest place I've ever been to, is right in the heart of Broadway/Times Sq. We were treated to a bottle of complementary fizz and chocolate covered strawberries as we are on our our honeymoon, which we necked giddily, before a

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quick shower and a wander up to see the sights of Times Square, along with a hot-daaaaaawg and a couple of drinks, in a cool Havana bar then an Italian wine bar/piano bar where we met a musician off Broadway who we chatted to for a while. Keith requested Billy Joel's New York State of mind and the live pianist nailed it. Absolutely awesome. We crawled back to the hotel for a nightcap, 22 hours after waking up in London, high on excitement and absolutely loving NYC

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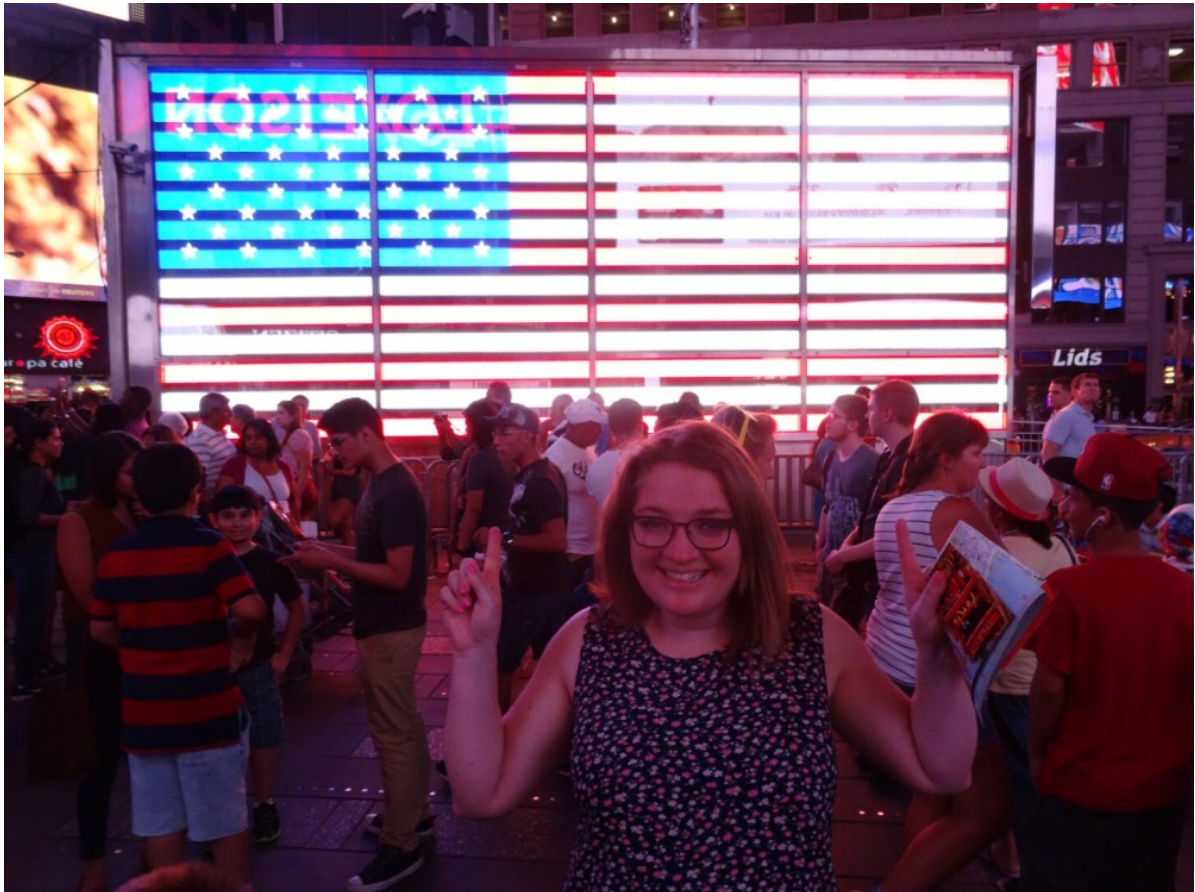
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Until next time

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