

Livin' It Up in Las Vegas 2021!



It's our first flight since the pandemic — 18 months.
We're off to Las Vegas to celebrate our Wedding Anniversary! Mask up & let's go!



Judy catches the shot as we fly in over "The Strip". Weather today: Sunny, hazy, 108 degrees!



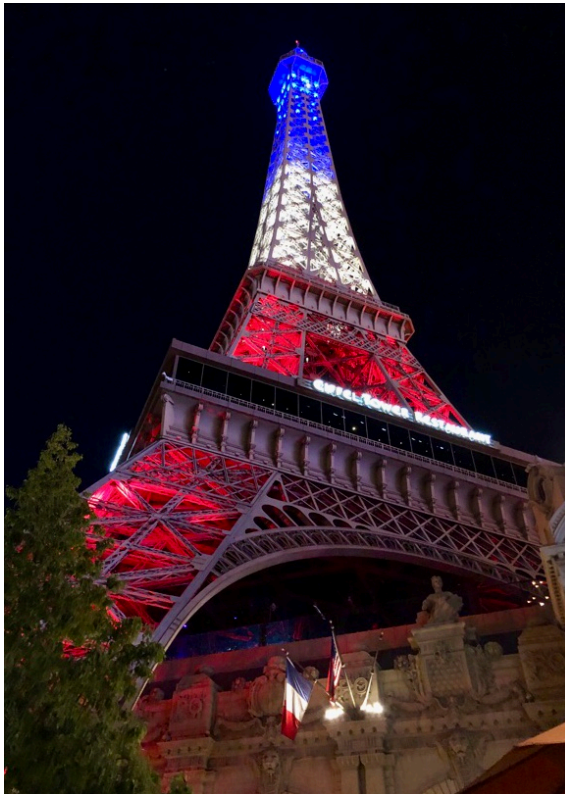
Seventeen years ago this week, we flew off to Vegas and waited on line at the Clark County Courthouse for our Marriage License. It took 3 hours, but.... you can't hurry love!



Then, we got married on the *Starship Enterprise* by Captain Kirk! (a much older version)
Not only is our marriage totally legal, it is also recognized throughout the entire Universe!
And now — we return to the scene of the crime!



We love Vegas because it's over-the-top! Where else can you visit Venice for a Gondola ride....



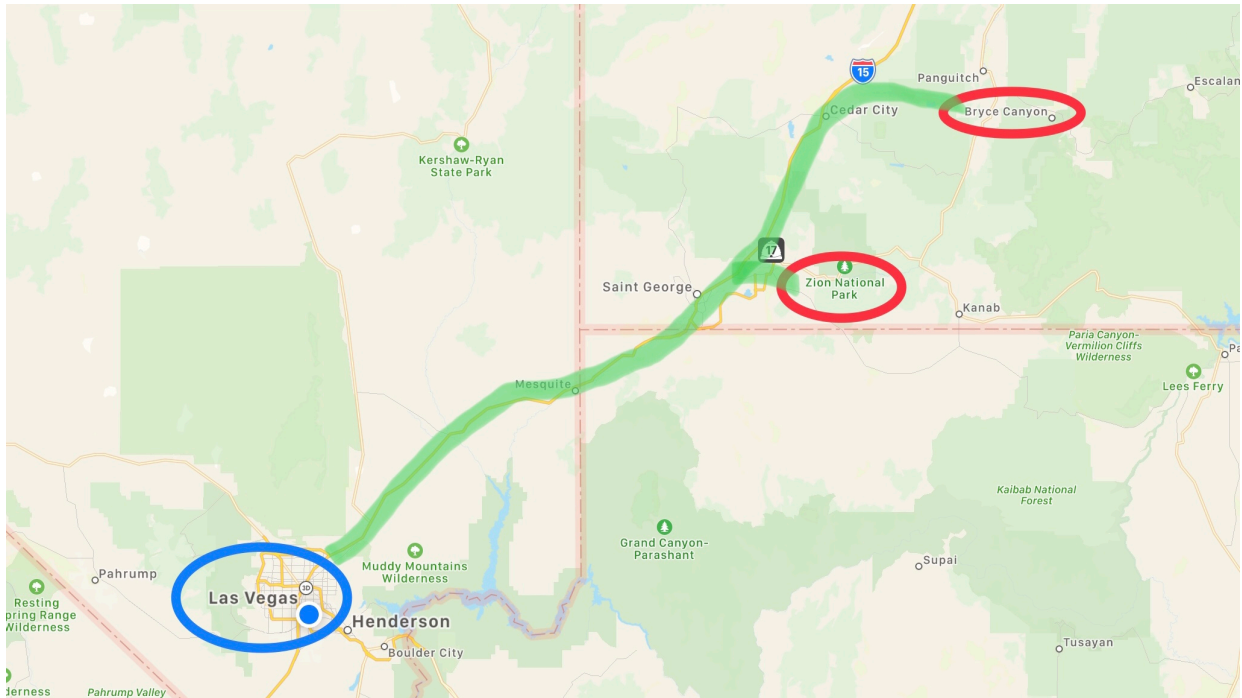
....& go up the Eiffel Tower; & exult in the glory of ancient Rome (Cæsar would be proud!)....



....and watch dancing fountains shoot into the night....



....and see a volcano explode into flames once an hour? Gotta love it!
But Vegas is also the gateway to the fantastic natural beauty of the Southwest...



So today we've booked a small-group guided tour (through Viator) to Bryce & Zion National Parks in Utah. It will be a long day, as Bryce is about 4 hours away.



The streets are quiet at our 5:30 AM pick-up. But shout-out to the world's greatest CVS, open 24 hours for all your health & beauty needs, including a full selection of beer, wine, and liquor! Dang it, I left my discount card back home!



Leaving civilization for the wilderness! To the mountains!



Entering Utah — now, THAT is MY kind of speed limit!



Bryce Canyon National Park. This whole area used to be underwater. A million years (give or take) of water recession & erosion created this valley of “hoodoos”.



Close-up of the hoodoos. Layers of different mineral sediments created the different colors.



View from a different angle. The place just stretches on and on!



“Limber pines” cling to life on the rocks



Folks can hike down through the canyon, about 1.5 hours.



We didn't do that, but we did power-walk up to "Inspiration Point" (at the arrow).



Awesome view!



Awesome couple!



Leaving Bryce, we pass a herd of buffalo!
Not free-range, they were on a ranch; but still, not something you see every day, even in Utah!



Next stop: Zion National Park, for some jaw-dropping magnificence!



I channel the spirits of the old west pioneers (although in Utah, they were mostly Mormons)



Judy “surfs the waves” on the mountain, formed by millennia of water & wind



Marvelous vistas surround us everywhere!



It looks photo-shopped, but it is not!
Thanks to our guide for the perfect shot, and to God for the perfect backdrop!



As night falls, we settle in for the long ride back to Las Vegas.
We're tired, but it's been a fantastic day!



It's a new day in Vegas! Though It's called "Sin City", we're not much for gambling & drinking...



...although we do love our coffee! But there's so much more to do here than gamble & drink.
So now that we're hyped up on caffeine....



Let's go shopping!



Too bad you can't really buy anything here, it's mostly high-end designers & luxuries — like Prada, Dior, Armani, Versace, Rolex, Cartier, Tiffany's — and the prices are astronomical.



But the Forum Shops at Caesar's Palace is itself spectacular and over-the-top, like this giant fountain filled with Roman mythological figures. We also love the ceiling of "blue skies" with scattered clouds...



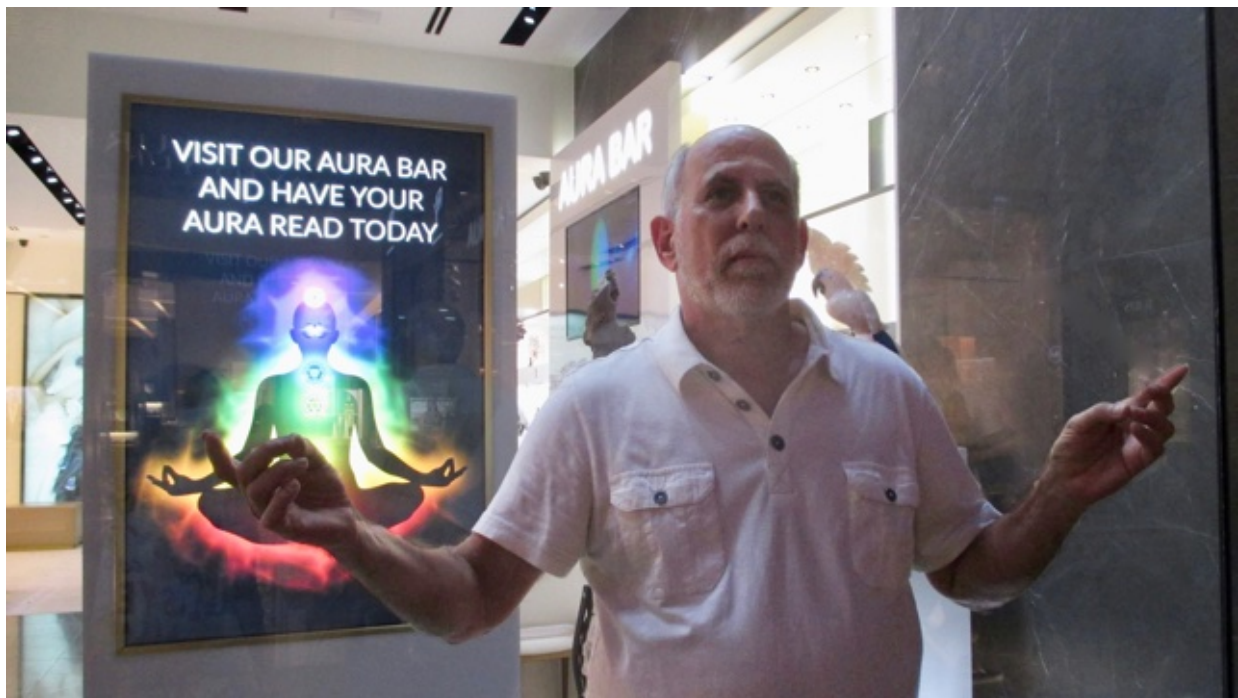
....and this fountain that bursts into flames every hour re-enacting the fall of Atlantis!



Even the ceilings are works of art!



Giant statues support the ceiling & spiral escalators connect the floors. Uh-oh, looks like Judy found something to buy.... Oh, it's just souvenirs. Whew!



Read my aura...? How much...? Forty-five dollars!?!? Fuhgeddaboutit!
I'm on Vacay and my aura is just FINE, thank you!



Not to be outdone, at the Venetian's Grand Canal Shops you can stroll through a scale model of Venice. You can also take a gondola ride, though at \$160, it's cheaper in the real Venice. Fuhgeddabout dat!



You can even dine in St Mark's Square (we had gelato). Speaking of dining, another thing we love about Vegas....



THE FOOD!! Every famous celebrity chef has a restaurant here. This is “Cake Boss” Buddy Valastro’s pizza with prosciutto, ricotta, arugula, and spicy chili honey drizzle. YUM!!



He is the Cake Boss, so naturally there is lots of cake! Oh yeah, we had some.... Double YUM!
So we blew our budget on dining instead of gaming. We had gala Anniversary dinners all week!



First: Emeril's (yes, the Emeril) New Orleans Fish House at the MGM Grand for a...



Shrimpfest! Judy had the seafood boil & I had the jambalaya. Look at the size of those shrimp!
And the New Orleans seasoning — as Emeril would say — BAM!!



Next: Gordon Ramsay's Hell's Kitchen, just like on TV! We feel rich & famous, just like on TV!
Judy looks beautiful & glamorous, just like the women on TV!



Chef Ramsay himself welcomes you virtually on a giant video screen!
This is so cool. After years of watching cooking shows on TV, we feel like we're in one!



Judy peruses the menu.
The restaurant has a cool modern vibe, with good spacing between the tables.



The servers were attentive, gracious and incredibly fast. The food was outstanding. I had braised short rib with roasted peaches & polenta cake. Judy had crispy skin salmon on a bed of white beans & chorizo with a seabeen salad. Wow, both were so good!



This is the real Hell's Kitchen — the TV competition is filmed at a separate studio in Las Vegas. Nevertheless, everybody wants their picture taken in front of the open red & blue kitchens, and we were no exception. The servers expect it and are happy to oblige.



They even comp'ed our Sticky Toffee Pudding dessert in honor of our Anniversary! Thanks, Chef Ramsay! Despite all your cussin', now we know you're really just a big softie!

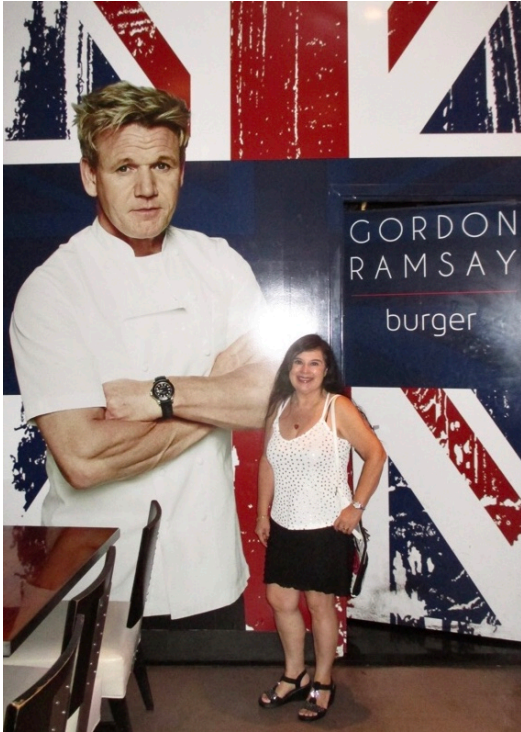


Las Vegas is also a celebration of fantastic shows. Continuing our celebration, the next night we went to Criss Angel's "MindFreak" magic show. After almost 2 hours of illusion, slight-of-hand, levitation, bright lights and loud music —



our minds were totally freaked! It was awesome.

....and after the show....



....Judy has another close encounter with Chef Ramsay, this time at his burger place!
Question: Would you pay \$25 for a burger (and no, you don't get fries with that...)? No...??



What if it was the BEST burger you ever had in your life? YES!! A beef patty topped with braised short rib, BBQ sauce, white cheddar, brown sugar bacon, arugula, & pickled shallots. Over-the-top, but totally worth it!

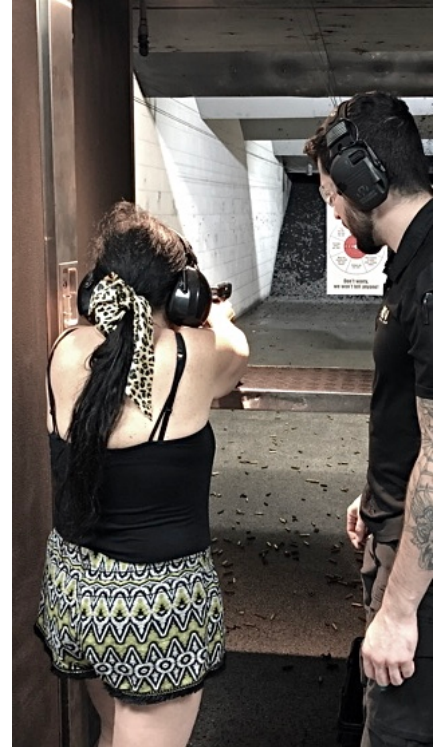
And now for something completely different:



We go totally outside our comfort zone at “Machine Guns Vegas”, where you can shoot stuff!



We are non-violent people & have never fired a weapon before, but a friend said we had to try it — where else can you fire a real machine gun? — so, hey, another YOLO moment!



Judy gets instruction on the Glock handgun: Ready, Aim, FIRE!



Holy @\$&%, she's good!! Beautiful and deadly! And look at that big happy-face smile! I've always said, do not mess with Judy — now I am even more afraid of her than I was before!



And check [this](#) out:
That shotgun may be bigger than she is, but she still shredded the crap out of that bullseye!



My turn! Livin' out my spy novel fantasies!



The name is.... Bond.... James Bond.... (cue the music....🎵)



I really wanted to try the semi-automatic sniper rifle, like the Gray Man.
Hot damn, that thing shoots fire! Eat hot lead, bad guys!
(quite a recoil, however — my shoulder was bruised for a week)



WOW! I've decided on my post-retirement career: SEAL Team Sixty-six! Sign me up!



Of course, we still condemn violence in all forms, but.... no pun intended.... we had a blast! (OK.... pun intended...sorry....)



Our final day in Vegas is our actual Anniversary, so tonight I've planned a truly special evening. After a stroll through The Bellagio Conservatory Garden, we have a reservation at:



Food Network's Giada DeLaurentiis restaurant overlooking The Strip for "Modern Italian".



Another place with a cool modern vibe

Giada
Tasting Menu

First

Arugula Salad

Candied Lemon, Crispy Pancetta & Parmigiano-Reggiano
Or

Romaine Salad

Torn Croutons, Fried Capers & Citrus Vinaigrette

Second

Spaghetti

Shrimp, Mascarpone Cheese, Lemon & Basil
or

Bucatini

Calabrian Chili Pomodoro & Fresh Ricotta
or

Cacio e Pepe

Pecorino Toscano, Crostini & Black Pepper

Third

Italian Fried Chicken

Cacciatore Style
or

***Salmon**

Ricotta Cavatelli, Fava Beans, Meyer Lemon
& Hearts of Palm Salad
or

***Petite Filet**

Grilled Treviso, Yellow Tomato Pomodoro & Avocado Crust

~Upgrade Petit Filet with 8oz Lobster Tail 45~

Dessert

Giada's Signature Cookies
Or

Chocolate Hazelnut Crunch Cake
Or

Chefs Selection of Seasonal Sorbetti and Berries

We decided to go for broke with Giada's 4-course all-inclusive special "Tasting Menu". Notice there is no price listed — if you have to ask, you shouldn't be eating here! (I won't tell you how much it cost, but I had to cash in my 401k....)



But from beginning to end, it was very special and totally worth it!



After 17 years — **STILL** boldly going where no marriage has gone before!
The voyage continues!