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New York Without Luggage, Reservations or Fresh Socks

By Laura Glendinning

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New York is an impossible place – an overbuilt island with a nasty climate, horrendous traffic and . . . magic. What's not to love? Our day trip to Manhattan was typical John and Laura – last minute. It was post Christmas and very cold after a snowstorm. The sky was bright blue and the wind was piercing as we stood at the bus stop in John's New Jersey hometown – Kearny. I, weak and pathetic after years of mild L.A. weather, huddled in a nearby store while John, the native, stood in the cold without gloves or scarf. He deigned to wear a hat, at least. I had in my pocket \$40, an American Express card and a lipstick. Oh yes, and a one use camera. Little did I know we wouldn't be back in Kearny for almost two days.

We took the excellent DeCamp Buslines bus over, warm and comfy. I watched the gritty landscape pass by, crumbling and winter-cracked overpasses, plenty of graffiti, salt-beaten cars. This is not a romantic way to get to NYC but a warm one. My dad the Scottish immigrant actually arrived via ocean liner and his first sight of America was of the Statue of Liberty. He even passed through immigration at Ellis Island. Now that's an arrival in New York. We got off at the grungy Port Authority where a taste of the winter wind had even John admitting he needed a scarf. He bought a post Christmas bargain for \$6. One thing you can do and want to do in New York is walk and we were soon warm enough as we marched out into the late morning and headed to the Metropolitan Museum. The place was thronged with families off school and work, plenty of art students and a well-organized staff. I was finally warm and very reluctant to get into the long coat check line and surrender my security blanket, but the line moved fast and we soon had our coat tags and dove into the crowds. John knows his modern art and we visited a lot of his favorites after an elegant snack in the café. The American Express card got its first of many uses there. We then traded off putting up with exhibits for each other. I examined the vintage baseball card collection for him and he joined me for the costume exhibit, focusing on the Duke and Duchess of Windsor's elaborate clothing. God those two could really dress – but then again maybe that was all they really had to do. . .

A couple of hours in a museum was plenty for us so out into the air we went. It was warmer at last. I hadn't been to New York since a lone high school trip many years before, so I had to see some of what I had seen before just to compare notes with myself. Central Park was easy since it borders on the

Met. Yep, still a big beautiful park. In winter kids were sliding down the modest hills and dogs romped – well they were dogs whose owners lived on the park so maybe they sashayed. The Plaza Hotel was also on the list of places to revisit. The lobby was as lavish as I remembered but it seemed smaller. Do all things shrink year by year? Or are they so big in your memory the present can never match the past?

New York is one of those places where the present does exceed the past, because it always has something new to show you. Last time I had done three theater shows, had a carriage ride through Central Park, visited the Statue of Liberty and Empire State Building, watched the St. Patrick's Day parade, all in four days. So this time I could relax, right? Well why relax in New York? We had

cellphone numbers for our respective friends and were secretly grateful when we couldn't reach any of them. The night would be ours – the plan was to catch a late bus, train or something back before they all stopped running. Rather than the subway, we used our all day transit passes and took the aboveground buses, which may not seem hip but run all the time and stop at convenient places. Cabs are not the necessity you might think they are. John wanted to show me the Village, one of the places where he had lived during his 6 years in the city. Dusk came quick and our first stop was an Internet café to check email. That's when the idea to stay over started brewing. Maybe we could get some kind of online deal for a last minute hotel for that night. We mulled it over at venerable McSorley's, a beer-only bar where women were not allowed until the '80's. The waiter remembered John and found us seats in the raucous holiday crowd. We somehow ended up at a table of college friends reuniting after stints in Arizona – or were they all headed to Arizona? The beers were flowing and the facts got fuzzy. They took our picture – recording us for posterity in the kind of winter get-up we'd never be wearing in California. McSorley's serves two kinds of beer – light and dark, both their own brews. Snacks consist of cheese, onions and hot mustard. And, oh yeah you have to order beers in sets of two, no splitting. Sawdust on the floor and dark wood complete the picture. After the beers it seemed to make sense to stay over and spend a great New York night without worrying about catching a bus back to New Jersey. We booked the Soho Grand for an okay rate and knew one thing for sure: at last we would be sleeping on a smooth surface after four sleepless nights on a sheet stretched over lumpy rocks – otherwise known as the ancient family guest room mattress.

Before the Grand was dinner – we decided to walk around and look for a likely place. John has no trouble asking local-looking people where they like to eat and they were happy to help. What's this rumor about bitter New Yorkers? Of course I was introduced as the visitor from L.A. so they had all the more reason to be sure I got something besides sprouts, tofu and sunflower seeds. We stopped in for raw oysters and champagne at a small but packed restaurant. It got to be around 9 and we figured we had a shot at getting into Balthazar without a reservation. Sure enough, we only had to wait about 45 minutes at the bar, pacing ourselves on the drinking by this point, believe you me. Dinner was quite wonderful, though I let myself get talked out of a local fish – cod – and talked into Chilean sea bass, which is unavoidable in L.A. restaurants. The waiter had obviously spent his childhood pushing cod around his plate and pretending he'd finished it. John's ravioli was phenomenal and led to him to keep perfecting his pasta and ravioli from scratch.

We rolled to the Grand with no bags to check in – I didn't even have a purse. I don't lug purses around as they are a drag to carry and a magnet for muggers. We stopped at a bodega and bought a

toothbrush, toothpaste and contact lens solution for me – \$9, not a bargain but who cared? We then hit the hotel and noted the hopping scene at the bar – and walked right past it. We fell into bed and slept blissfully – though by morning's light we discovered the room was tiny. Didn't this used to be an old SRO hotel? They certainly didn't increase the room size when it was converted to a profit center. John pointed out the view from our window and what it was missing – the World Trade Center. Solemn moment.

We got a late check out and debated what to do. Well, eating was going to happen, but first some great walking and a truly wonderful cup of coffee at a place we ducked into. Don't ask me the name. New York is teeming with picturesque side streets with tiny cafes, shops, galleries and what not. We ended up at Veselka around 2 p.m. This is a classic Eastern European restaurant at 10th and 2nd Avenue. I got stuffed cabbage and borscht and even went for dessert. We read the NY Times at our window table and watched the world go by. But the break was over. One of the people we were to meet at last returned a cell call. Okay, I admit it, we turned the phone off for hours so as to be unreachable. I mean, ahem, conserve the battery. We arranged to meet him in midtown and walked all the way (40 blocks or

so, but John the native assured me they were the short blocks, not the crosstown blocks). The walk took us across the strange diagonal which Broadway becomes and I started to get a feel for the geography of the city, something that's hard to do in a cab, bus or car. We met my friend for drinks at another "guys' bar" with an after work crowd culled from Wall Street. John had a White Russian that seemed to be made with maple syrup. More of a beer and scotch place I guess.

Then it was time for a hellish run to the Port Authority, both needing to find a bathroom and desperate to catch the bus in time to make it back to Jersey and a long-arranged night with the family at the Scots-American social club. Back in Jersey, Manhattan was a vision across the water again. John's brother-in-law Joey kept the wine and beer going as it was his night to tend bar, but after the night before we kept it light. I persuaded my native hosts to go back to Manhattan the next day, this time to hit the Natural History Museum. We drove over with John's Pop at the wheel of his car, nice enough to drive to a city he hates. He used to have a sidewalk stand in the Village, where John sold his original paintings as well. He reminisced about those days, and the really old days, when he met John's mom at a Catholic dance in 1949 and by age 18 was married.

We tried for close to 25 minutes to find parking near the museum and actually succeeded. Pop and I were on the lookout for a spot while John napped, still catching up on sleep after another night back on the lumpy mattress. He woke up just in time to find a spot for us, claiming we needed his expertise. Okay, but who drove up and down ten square blocks until we found an undiscovered street? Now I was feeling the real New York. Scour the place for parking or pay the astounding rate of \$24 for 2 hours. Pleased with our find, we trudged to the museum where a huge line meant we could not possibly get in. What to do?

How about a trip to Hoboken? But first I felt I had to see Ground Zero. It was a crisp December Saturday as we edged through typically hellish traffic down to the tip of Manhattan. Everyone had warned me that it was just a big hole in the ground surrounded by a chain link fence. We couldn't park or get much closer but circled a little. I could see the fence was decorated – and perhaps still is – with tattered mementoes of the dead. Pictures, ribbons, poems, posters. A faded picture of a young woman

stays in my mind. She is smiling in a stiff pose; maybe it's some kind of studio shot. I glimpsed hawkers selling shirts, flags and buttons – the post Christmas vacation crowd had a festive feel but I didn't get close enough to feel the other vibe I knew was there. The sad one. And the angry one.

So it was back through the Lincoln Tunnel to Jersey. We toured Hoboken, where both John's parents were born. We drove past Sinatra's birthplace, very well marked and easy to find within the two square miles which is Hoboken. We then prepared to double or maybe even triple park, per tradition, outside Biggie's Clams. It was a 1940's social club/illegal gambling joint that served food so good it had become mostly a restaurant by the '50's. I had raw clams on the half shell and was very content. East coast seafood is cold water seafood, somehow brinier and crisper than the Gulf seafood where I grew up. Maybe there is an argument for cold climates after all.

We were soon back at Pop's, greeted by his cat Duke, standoffish as ever. The guys had managed to find a New York Times for me after three tries at local Kearny newsstands. They watched football and I read the paper. We drank hot tea and ate cake and it was hard to imagine that the high rises of New York were so close to this cozy middle class street. There was more eating that night. Italian food, of course. Huge portions for your average "gavone" – Italian for what I had become on the trip – someone who eats everything in sight. But, New York in the winter is made for eating...when in Rome.

The Advantages of Wheeled Luggage

By Jerry Smith

For many years people have been carrying their luggage or more to the point lugging it around when they traveled. The evolution of luggage brought us luggage with wheels. It's a real boon for travelers to have luggage on wheels.

The main reason wheeled luggage is preferred is because its use makes getting through the airports easier. The ease of mobility with wheeled luggage is another reason for its preferred use. Now, all manufacturers put wheels on their luggage. Wheeled luggage also reduces the strain on your back.

Things to consider when looking at wheeled luggage include the quality of the wheels, the type of frame, whether it has a telescoping handle, and what material the bags are made of. Also, consider the durability of the luggage. Take into account the frequency of your traveling, if it's occasional durability is not as much of a concern as it would be if you were a frequent traveler. Frequent travelers need luggage that will survive the rough handling it will get.

There is a variety of luggage types available. Depending on your needs you could use an upright carryon, a wheeled duffel bag, or a rolling suit/garment bag. Backpacks, computer bags, and totes now come with wheels as well. Luggage for kids also comes with wheels making them feel grown-up.

The convenience and time saving qualities of luggage on wheels make them a great asset for travelers. Since most luggage now has wheels everyone can afford them. Wheeled luggage is here to

stay.

Jerry Smith can help you. Find out how thousands of people have been helped with the advice and information. Visit this link for details:



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