

[Anthony's America 6: Madonna Inn, Movie Expos, Film LA, No Wankers in Santa Barbara, Soulless Vegas & Death Valley](#)



In the past ten days I've driven over 2000 miles across California and Nevada. It's been an eventful time full of fun and pain, beauty and beasts. I left Mendocino County to drive down through San Francisco (over the Golden Gate Bridge) to Los Angeles as I was helping represent the Mendocino Film Office at a Hollywood locations managers tradeshow. This was, as Americans call them, an "Expo": where film liaison officers come from all over California to promote their county to location managers. These are the "scouts" looking for new,

unique places to film their next TV series or movies.

There was a lot of wine drinking and chatting to producers and location scouts; I gathered very quickly the free wine was to get the scouts so drunk they agreed to come and film in your area. Devious but clever.

I met some really great people; location managers working on TV series like *Flashforward*, *Dexter*, *24*, *Numbers* and *Mad Men*. I also met some terrible people. Mainly British ones. I'm not particularly "Posh British" and so have a natural, uncontrollable aversion to those who are. So when two older men - one in an ill-fitting leather jacket and bright scarf, the other in huge glasses and orange shirt - approached my conference table and spoke in over-the-top upperclass British accents ("Oh hello, old chap! I'm an *accktoor*, you know! What!") I thought: *Aaargh! Go away before I wrap your scarf around your-*



Okay, I know I'm a bitch. And some of you might think I'm a bit dumb writing opinions on a blog about people I could potentially work with in LA. The answer to that is two-fold: 1) I'm a very good judge of character and 2) I'm at the stage in my life where I don't work with dicks.

However, I discovered there were *a lot* of old, pervy-producer men at the event who claimed they "only did BIG movies, only blew up BIG buildings and only worked in this industry to grope skinny blonde women's asses". And these were the men who it was quite clear hadn't done any real movie work in a *long time*. How do I know? Because, when I asked what they were working on right now, they all replied: "oh, er, I'm in between projects". Knobs.

On the flip side, there was a fantastic guy I met called Todd who worked for Film LA. Todd is the Vice President of Communications at Film LA, which is a private company working for the government. It is contracted to keep a close eye on all filming in Los Angeles' many communities. Film LA's job is to ensure the city's 13 million residents are as happy as possible when studios such as Dreamworks close off streets and blow up buildings. No film-maker is allowed to do anything in LA without getting a Film LA permit first; an interesting part of the Hollywood film-making process I never knew about.



Todd was kind enough to explain all this, at the same time as giving me a tour of the huge backlot sound stages at his work. Films such as *Die Hard 4.0* were filmed here and there are hundreds of "movie vehicles" - news vans, New York yellow cabs, racing cars and police cars - sitting in a parking lot out the back waiting to be used in the latest blockbuster.

Film LA is based in downtown Los Angeles, which is a slightly scary place for someone - such as myself - who has never been there. I got quite lost and ended up in a rundown neighbourhood where, let's just say, I was checking my pickup's fuel gauge to make sure I had enough petrol (gas) to get outta there. Gulp.

And thanks very much to Marlene and Greg for letting me stay at their place in Los Angeles. You were perfect hosts.



But, before reaching LA, I stopped for a cup of tea at the bizarre Pink Kitsch Hell that is The Madonna Inn in San Luis Obispo. This is a major tourist attraction because it is an [ugly] amalgamation of American decorative styles. Oh, and the men's toilet has a fountain in it. Even though it was a lovely cup of tea The Madonna Inn wasn't, well, my cup of tea.

So I headed further south to stay over night in the beautiful Santa Barbara. This was a very chilled out town next to a gorgeous sandy beach. It has fantastic Spanish architecture and a colourful main street full of shops, cafes and a "London Pub". This "British" pub had a prominent Union Jack flag out front and, to my surprise, a very clear sign on the door reading: "No Wankers".

Americans don't seem to use the word "wanker" so, perhaps, don't really know its meaning (although it doesn't take a large brain to work it out). In the UK you couldn't put a "No Wankers" sign on a pub door (unless, perhaps, you were in East London, Glasgow or Portsmouth) as it's too offensive. But you can get away with it over here as no one understands its meaning. (I wondered if the pub owner knew - but decided they could be English and using the term oh so ironically. I couldn't find out because, like any English pub early in the morning, it was closed.)



So I walked to the end of Santa Barbara's pier - Stearns Wharf - instead, which reminded me of Brighton in the UK, minus the tall palm trees. There was a small fish cafe called *The Santa Barbara Shellfish Company* at the end of the pier where I had a much-needed beer and some shrimp tacos. I've never had shrimp tacos before. They blew my head off; hot n' spicy, dude.

And, talking of hot, I spent a fantastic day driving around the barren beauty of Death Valley. This is a huge stretch of wild desert and

mountainous landscape, where the hottest ground temperature in the valley's central town - Furnace Creek - was recorded as 201 degrees fahrenheit (94 C) in 1972. I visited one of the many ghost towns in the valley, Rhyolite. In the old Wild West days, this spooky place used to house 10,000 people. But now it's just a few rundown buildings, rusty abandoned trucks and a collapsed school.



Cue spooky music - doo-doo-doo-doo - and a tumbleweed rolling across the street.

Sadly, my trip before Death Valley took me to a disgusting, soulless, lump of capitalist fakery called Las Vegas. Eurgh, horrible place I'd like to forget I visited.

My visit to this awful city was made worse by the fact I officially broke the law: I was pulled over by what is commonly called A Fascist Pig (otherwise known as the police - and, as I've worked for the police for two years, I'm entitled to use that phrase knowingly) for allegedly driving my pickup too fast.

Well, okay, it wasn't allegedly. I really *was* driving way too fast - 86 miles an hour in a 65 zone, according to Mr Fascist. Yes, I'm a bad boy and have no excuse, except I was on a long desert highway reading the huge advertisements for Vegas shows and not paying attention to my speed. At least, not until the red and blue lights flashed in my rearview mirror.



After proceeding to chastise me by shouting at me, Mr Fascist took all my ID. I then played the Bumbling British Person enough so that Mr Fascist - er, police officer - just booked me for doing 70 miles an hour in a 65 zone to keep my fine down. How nice of him. Grrrr. He also wrote down my address in Mendocino wrong too, so I'm hoping I might get away with it. (Unlikely.)

Following this, the hotel I stayed at in Vegas - called Circus Circus - was a pretty seedy joint. I got to my room and promptly slipped over on some tiles, landing right on my coccyx. This bloody hurt for the next three days.



Something, I realised, was telling me NOT to stay in Vegas. So, after walking through most of the grotesque Strip hotels, I left Vegas...never EVER to return. I was so annoyed at the place (can you tell?) that I didn't even go to the Grand Canyon. Maybe I'll make it there another day.

After this, I headed back up to Sacramento to spend another lovely weekend with Lynne and Ben. Except, they didn't actually know I was coming. I arrived at 12.45am and woke them both up (sorry guys, and thanks for letting me stay!).



In Sacramento I had my very first Drive-in movie experience, which I loved. We saw *Cop Out* and *Edge of Darkness* together as, apparently, drive-ins always do double-bill movie showings. I was slightly disappointed there were no pony-tailed roller girls in knee-high socks serving drinks and burgers with a tray at your car window, but we had popcorn with parmesan cheese on instead, which kind of made up for it. Yummy.

And, after my mini-adventure, I'm now back in Fort Bragg for a few more weeks and looking forward to enjoying the whale festival and lots of ale drinking. Yay! As usual, you can view all my pictures related to this part of my trip [here](#) and, until next time, stay well and smile.