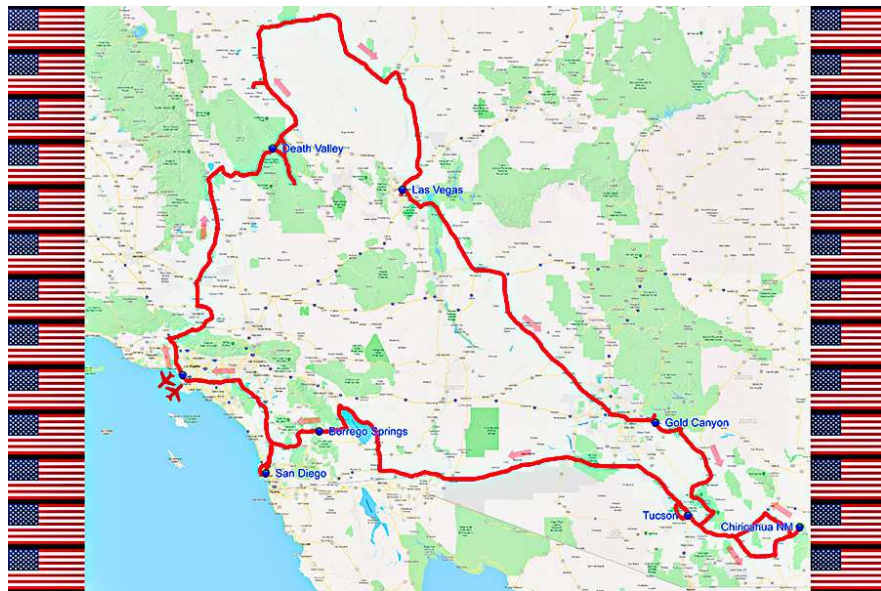


Wild Wild West – USA 2022



from Munich to Death Valley _____	3
Death Valley _____	4
from Death Valley to Las Vegas _____	7
Las Vegas _____	10
from Las Vegas to Tucson _____	12
Tucson _____	14
from Tucson via Borrego Spring to San Diego _____	17
San Diego _____	19
from San Diego to Los Angeles and back home _____	22



Date	Destination	Hotel	Milage day	Milage total
Wed.	23.2 Santa Clarita, CA	La Quinta Inn & Suites	34	34
Thur.	24.2 Beatty, NV	Exchange Club Motel	424	458
Fri.	25.2 Beatty, NV		207	665
Sat.	26.2 Las Vegas, NV	OYO Hotel and Casino	374	1.039
Sun.	27.2 Las Vegas, NV		67	1.106
Mon.	28.2 Las Vegas, NV		29	1.135
Tue.	1.3 Gold Canyon, AZ	Best Western	329	1.464
Wed.	2.3 Tucson, AZ	Cat Mountain Lodge	233	1.697
Thur.	3.3 Tucson, AZ		67	1.764
Fri.	4.3 Tucson, AZ		310	2.074
Sat.	5.3 Borrego Springs, CA	Stanlunds Inn & Suites	449	2.523
Sun.	6.3 San Diego, CA	Best Western	107	2.630
Mon.	7.3 San Diego, CA	Yacht Harbor Hotel	55	2.685
Tue.	8.3 Temecula	Hampton Inn & Suites	84	2.769
Wed.	9.3 Flughafen LAX		89	2.858

At the end of 2021, Covid-19 still had a firm grip on the world. While it was possible to travel quite easily within Europe, the options for more distant destinations were quite limited. So it was good to hear that the U.S. finally lifted its travel ban late last fall.

I still had a few days off, which I was supposed to take until the end of the year. Freya is slowly recovering from her health issues but didn't want to join. So I booked flights, hotels, and a rental car for a trip to Florida in December – and then Omicron came along. Everything started to get blurry. Booster shots were not available unless you had been vaccinated at least 6 months ago, rumors about new travel restrictions popped up and my motivation to fly dropped close to zero.

One of the few positive things about Covid is that you can change your plans quite easily these days. So I rebooked my flights to late February and canceled the rest. A few days later, Lufthansa, for their part, canceled the newly booked direct flight to Miami and I decided to move the trip to the Southwest.

Now I'm flying to Los Angeles, a destination that is not very likely to be canceled and going for a two-week road trip from

there. It will be a nice mix of areas I want to revisit and places I've not been to before.

23/24.02. – from Munich to Death Valley

My flight is scheduled to take off from Munich around noon. That means that if I get up just a bit earlier than usual I have enough buffer for the morning drive through Munich and the extra checks at the airport.

In the end, though, that wasn't necessary at all. Normal travel traffic on the way to the airport and the check-in and security check were almost empty. They are now testing new scanners there where you can leave everything in your bags. They seem to work quite well and speed up the whole process considerably.

Boarding takes place in the outer terminal. Because of Covid, however, this is not fully functional yet and so I stay in the lounge on the main side. Since the train to the second terminal also does not run as frequently as usual, I am told to leave at least 30 minutes before boarding starts.

As usual with US flights, one is checked again before entering the gate area, but

since I have uploaded all documents, it goes quite quickly. Business-class is 90% full, but few of the passengers look like they are on a business trip.

Apart from having to wear a mask all the time, the flight is nothing special. Since it's a day flight, it feels even longer than it already is. I manage to snooze for an hour or two, watch 3 movies and wait for the time to pass.



Club Ed Movie Set - Lancaster

Finally, we arrive. The immigration is almost empty. They have removed all the machines and check the documents like in the old days. But although only a few counters are open, it takes me only 10 minutes or so to get through. My luggage is also ready to be picked up and so I make my way to the shuttles that go to the rental car companies.

Same situation at the Alamo rental station: No queues, no questions, no attempts to sell me any extra stuff. There are not many cars, but more than enough for the few people. I take a white Jeep Compass 4x4 with almost 9000 miles.

From home I have booked a motel in Santa Clarita, a few miles north of Los



Joshua Tree - Lancaster

Angeles. The drive is as expected: It takes me nearly 2 hours for the 35 miles. I check-in and drive to Walmart, which is half a mile away, to buy the essentials for the next few days.

Back at the motel, I manage to stay awake until 9pm. That means I've been awake for almost 24 hours now. But it's still not enough to overcome the jet lag. I wa-

ke up early and can't sleep anymore, even though it's only 4am. So I read some more, repack my things as I will need them in the next few days, and am with the first to have breakfast at 6am. Shortly after, I'm on my way to Death Valley.

As this is quite a drive the plan is to make two stops in between. The first one is close by, between Lancaster and Palm-

dale. In the middle of nowhere, there are two movie sets that are still used today when Hollywood wants to show a 1950s motel.

The first one is called Club Ed Movie Set. Unfortunately, you can't really get close. It's gated off and clearly marked as private property. The second problem is that the sun is directly behind the building. So if you want to go there, you should do it in the

afternoon if possible. On the other hand, there are some beautiful Joshua Trees across the street that are now benefiting from the still low sun.

Second stop just a few miles away is the Four Aces Movie. This complex is a little bit bigger and is also next to the street, but here a film crew is preparing a shooting. So I just pass by and drive back to

the CA-14 to go to my next stop: Red Rock Canyon State Park.

This park consists of two parts that are right on the highway. Coming from the south, the first part is on the right side of the road. I turn off the highway, and there is a huge parking lot that is completely empty except for one truck whose driver goes to the bathroom here and leaves soon after.

This part is the „red one“ with nice

rock formations. There are some hoodoos as well, but not as impressive as elsewhere. I walk along the cliff, trying to catch some nice compositions.



Red Rock Canyon State Park



Red Rock Canyon State Park

After a while I turn around and go back to the car to drive a few yards to the second part that is located on the other side of the highway. Contrary to some descriptions on the internet, there are now reasonable turn lanes to both parts of the park. Just past the entrance there is a small parking area and a marked trail that I will take. The rock formations are similar to those on the other side but already less reddish.

Up to this point, you can visit the park for free. The paid area starts when you drive further into this part of the park. There is a campground and some more rocks to

visit. But since they are completely gray now, I turn around and drive towards Death Valley.

The rest of the drive is nothing special if you have been in this area before. Only the temperature is different from most other months. A little further towards Bishop are some of the most recommended ski resorts in California. So as I turn onto NV-190 the car shows me a warning because the temperature has dropped below 0°C (37°F). Now it is not far and I reach Death Valley National Park.

24/25.02 – Death Valley

I stop in Stovepipe Wells to buy the annual pass for the National Parks. It's not clear if it really pays off but already the entrance fees for Death Valley and Saguaro National Park in Tucson together are almost as expensive and if not it's for a good cause.

From here I drive on to Beatty. Beatty is the first town after Death Valley and is already in Nevada. Since the two hotels inside the national park are super expensive for what they offer, Beatty is a good alternative. It's my first extended visit to Death Valley since 2000, and I'll be staying at the same motel as last time, the Exchange Club.

Since it is only afternoon, I change the plan a little. Instead of driving Artist Drive, I want to visit Rhyolite (which is next to Beatty anyway) and then drive up to Bad Water Point.

I was already in Rhyolite on my last trip but only looked at the art exhibits at the beginning. Now I also want to drive to the end to have a look at the old ruins. So after the art exhibition, which I of course visit again, I drive to the Bottle House and then to the old train station. It may not be a complete waste of time and certainly of some historical significance, but

for me, the exhibits are much more interesting than the rest.

Now I still want to get to Bad Water Point. When I enter the destination into my Garmin GPS, I have to realize that I have clearly underestimated the distances



Rhyolite Ghost Town

grab the tripod and join the many people who are now still going down into the salt lake. At first, all you see is white powder, because all the hundreds of people who come here every day don't leave any intact salt structures. I walk for half an hour until



Badwater Point - Death Valley

here in Death Valley. But ok, so it will be a blue hour shooting instead of a sunset. I arrive just as the sun has disappeared behind the mountains. I park my car,



Badwater Point - Death Valley

there are only a few others with me. Now geometric structures can be seen along the way. Before it gets too dark, I pick one that looks interesting, set up my

tripod, and start taking pictures. Now I „only“ have to go back to the car. Even though it's getting dark now, you can't go wrong. My eyes have become sufficiently accustomed to the residual light to recognize the wide path. I do not need the headlamp that I carry with me.

The next morning I leave at 5:30 to take some sunrise photos of the Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes. On the drive from Betty to the main road of the National Park, the NV-190, I don't see a single car. I begin to wonder if I would really be alone in the dunes. But no way, at the par-

king lot are already 8 other cars, and considering how far away some of the people are, they must have started at least 30 minutes earlier. But the dunes are big enough for everyone to find their spot.

Unlike most other people, I turn right. I start taking pictures in the direction of the rising sun until it is high enough to light up the mountains to the west. Now it's getting harder and harder to avoid other people in the

picture, but from time to time I intentionally pick one up to emphasize the size of the dunes.



Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes - Death Valley



Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes - Death Valley

As the sun climbs higher, I return to the car and drive the short distance to Harmony Borax Works. I get there at 7:30 and there is only one other car in the parking lot. The 20-Mule-Team-Wagon used to transport processed borax to Mojave around 1885 is perfectly situated in the morning light. I also drive through the adjacent Mustard Canyon. You can do that if you're here anyway and have an SUV, but you won't miss much if you skip it.

My original plan for the day was to drive through Titus Canyon, but then I read in the newspaper you get at the National Park the suggestion for a hike: Golden Canyon. There are several ways to continue, including up to Zabriskie Point. But I want to return to the starting point via Gower Gulch and have included the de-

tour to Red Cathedral. Hiking in Death Valley is usually difficult because of the high temperatures. So this could be a once-in-a-lifetime-opportunity to do

so. Who knows if I will return here again in winter. If you are here at another time of year, you might be able to walk the first part of Golden Canyon, at least if you leave very early. Then you can find some shade. Later in the day or further back on the trail, you'll have to walk in the full sun. So know your limits!



Harmony Borax Works - Death Valley

The nature here is gorgeous. I follow the main canyon, but can't resist exploring one of the side canyons as well. The path is more or less flat and easy to walk. Then

I reach the turnoff to Red Cathedral. Now the trail starts to climb, but that's no problem. Next comes a slot canyon where you have to climb a bit to get ahead, but after this part it gets tricky. The whole trail is sandy and slippery. In the slot canyon, the walls are close enough to lean on, but as the trail gets wider and

steeper, I'm afraid to slip. Some people use hiking poles, which is certainly a good idea. So at some point, I decide there's no point in taking the risk and return to the main trail.

This is now also ascending and at the latest here you can no longer find shade. The path is not complicated, but you should be surefooted because it leads over a steep slope. Finally, I reach the highest point of my trail. I could continue to Zabriskie Point, but that would be just for the sake of going up. The light is too harsh to take photos, and I haven't taken out my camera in at least an hour.

The way downwards starts very easily through a wide riverbed, where you can really feel the power of the water if it rains here. Then the riverbed suddenly turns into a slot canyon, and you have to



Golden Canyon - Death Valley



Golden Canyon - Death Valley



Golden Canyon - Death Valley

climb down some pretty deep steps. With my long legs, I manage that quite easily, but some older people from a hiking group had to fight a bit and are happy that their guide shows up and supports them. There is one more tricky passage where you have to be sure-footed again, and then it's just down the valley back to the parking lot.

mountains. But before I go there, I make a side trip to the Keane Wonder Mine. On the road I take from Beatty towards Furnace Creek, there is a sign I have passed 3 times. Now I want to know what is there. A small gravel road leads up toward the mountains and at the end is a small parking lot for, let's say, 5 or 6 cars. This is an

sun and the various colors of the minerals begin to glow. There are two designated parking areas from which one can walk a few yards to viewpoints.

Again it is dark when I return to the hotel. Tomorrow I will leave Death Valley and head for Las Vegas.

26.02 – from Death Valley to Las Vegas

I had several options planned for today. In general, the goal was to drive to Las Vegas. If you go direct, it's about a two-hour drive. But that's not the idea of a road trip, is it? One option was to drive to a more remote sand dune and the other



Keane Wonder Mine - Death Valley



Artists Palette - Death Valley



in Gold Point

The whole area is very well signposted by the way and there were only 2 places where I had to think about how to continue.

After that, I drive back to Beatty to get something for lunch. Based on yesterday's experience, I know that I have to be at Artist Drive at least an hour before sunset to have the rocks in nice light. Later, the sun will be behind the

old mining area and you are asked not to leave the trail. There are some remains of the old mine, partially stabilized by steel and concrete. Nothing overwhelming but more of a ghost town feeling than Rhyolite.

Now, finally, Artist Drive. This is a nine-mile (14.5 km) paved one-way road that winds through the mountainside. The mountains are illuminated by the setting

was to drive north toward Gold Field, where I had been 4 years ago. At that time I missed the turnoff to Gold Point because my Garmin had a different idea of where it was. So finding Gold Point is the first task of the day.

If you know where to go, it's pretty easy. You have to leave the US-60 at the turnoff to Lida Airport, drive a few miles on the NV-266, and then turn left on the,

still paved, NV-774. However, my Garmin indicates that I am now driving off-road. No wonder it didn't find the right way last time.

But on this early Saturday morning, I don't see anyone. I only hear some music coming from one house. The settlement is great. I leave my car at the village border and stroll around. It is freezing cold, but dry, the sky is blue and it is not too windy. There are old fire trucks, rusty wrecked cars and beautiful old wooden houses – some in good condition, others falling apart. I spend quite a while here before turning around and heading back onto the US-60 and north.

Before you enter downtown Gold Field, you can turn right and

rest of the last church". I was here 4 years ago and back then you had to know where you were going. In the meantime, the city has realized that the exhibition is an asset. So now there is a sign and a vi-

don't expect a fancy building). With my Jeep, driving to the exhibit is no problem, but if you have a low clearance car, you have to be careful as the road has some steep climbs and descents. If it

car near the main road and walk. It's not too far.

I am not sure if they removed some cars. In my memory, there were more. But

what is definitely different are the paintings on the cars. There are still a lot of high-quality paintings and the concept is very different from Cadillac Ranch in Texas where everyone is invited to spray on the cars. I walk around for a while and take pictures of the most interesting pieces before continuing on to downtown Gold Field.

It's still pretty cold and I even find patches of snow here and there. As I walk down the main street, a car stops and the lady inside tells me to stop at the visitor center. She wants to give me a brochure

come to the „First international carfo- sitor center (well, something like that – is wet or you are unsure, better leave the about the history and the remarkable



in Gold Point



in Gold Point



in Gold Point



in Gold Point



in Gold Point



First international car forest of the last church - Goldfield

off the main road, so I drive there. I'm not quite sure what this is. The train looks like an exhibit, but the rest looks more like a scrapyard. While I'm taking pictures, my camera tells me that my SD card is full. I did take quite



First international car forest of the last church - Goldfield

ones the next day.

Now it's time to fill up again (the range of the Jeep Compass is anything but impressive), but the gas station that my Garmin indicates is no longer there.



First international car forest of the last church - Goldfield

buildings of the city. Sure enough, she parks her car, opens the visitor center, which is actually locked, and gives me the brochure. She also tells me where I can find more old cars and an old train. What a great service!

The place with the train is almost a mile

te some pictures this morning, but nowhere near enough to fill the card. Apparently, I forgot to format it yesterday. My usual routine is to copy the pictures to a hard drive and make a backup on a second hard drive. When those tell me the copy was successful, I format my card(s) and start with fresh

The next one is in Tonopah, which is further north. But if I go there, the logical way to Las Vegas would be via the Extraterrestrial Highway. That's exactly what I did 4 years ago and decided not to do it again because it's one of the most boring drives I've ever done. But there aren't many alternatives. Dri-

ving all the way back to Betty isn't an option either. So let's do it.

Of course, I stop at the Little A'Le'Inn in Rachel and since it's later noon, I stay for a burger (you can forget the fries, but the burger was tasty). Now I'm ready for the rest of the drive to the hotel in Las Vegas.



in Goldfield



in Goldfield



in Goldfield

26-28.02 – Las Vegas

I arrive at the OYO hotel around 4pm. This is the former Hooters Hotel and the restaurant of the same name is still there. It is a little off the south end of the strip. It seems like they just changed the name and didn't invest much in renovations. Things kind of work, but are pretty outdated. From the air conditioning to the bathroom faucets to the elevators. Even the air conditioning in the casino is not able to absorb the smell from the smokers.

Back in the room, the first thing I

have to do is back up my SD cards and charge the battery. This takes quite a while, but around 6 o'clock I make my way to the Strip.

My first destination is the Bliss Dance sculpture near the T-Mobile Arena. The arena, by the way, is not somewhere on the outskirts of town where you can easily drive and park, but right behind the New York New York Hotel.

There's a hockey game today and lots of people out and about. The sculpture is not easy to photograph anyway with all the distracting lights in the background, but regarding the people I just have to wait until most of them have disappeared into the arena. For the few that are still walking around now, I have to rely on the magic of long exposure.



Seven Magic Mountains - Las Vegas

I keep walking along the Strip, but it's not really fun today. Whatever you wear, it's wrong – it's too cold outside and when you enter a casino, it's way too warm. After a while I turn back without taking more photos.

The next morning I am early enough for some sunrise photos of the Seven Magic Mountains. The early light of the low sun

brings out the colors of the rocks especially well. As I wrote last time, the chance of hitting a jackpot at the casino is higher than being there alone. In fact, there are already 3 other cars in the parking lot. Not photographers, but a group of young people walking around and taking pictures of themselves in silly poses.

On the way back to the hotel I read that



Bliss Dance - Las Vegas

today is the Las Vegas Half Marathon and that some roads will be closed. At the hotel I check and of course, it's not just anywhere, but right on the Strip. This means that I have to change my plans for the day, as it will be difficult to get back to the hotel without a major detour.

The plan for today was shopping any-

way. But I also found an indoor flea market I wanted to visit, and it's now off-limits. So I head to Walmart, REI (my favorite outdoor chain in the US that I always visit when I'm in the area, even if I don't have a specific plan to buy anything), and finally the Las Vegas South Premium Outlets. I'm not really in a shopping mood, but I do find a few shoes that are on my wish list. The rest will have to wait.

Since I still have some time before the closures start, I drive to the BASS Outdoor World. The last time I was there was in 2009 and I had forgotten how huge it is.

They even have a couple of waterfalls and a huge aquarium. They sell everything and nothing: from clothes and shoes to fishing gear, from dog toys to grills. And of course, all kinds of guns. Pistols and rifles, but also bows and crossbows. There's even a shooting range to try them out. I don't want to take out my big camera but snap a few pictures with the phone instead.



High Roller Ferris Wheel - Las Vegas



Downtown Las Vegas



Downtown Las Vegas



Downtown Las Vegas

When I return to the hotel, I see that the police have already prepared everything for the closure, but I can still pass without problems.

I now take a short break at the hotel to write part of this travelogue before I head back to the Strip. This time I leave at 3:30pm and it is much better than yesterday. It's warm enough to walk around in a shirt without a fleece jacket, and of course, that fits in a casino as well.

The preparations for the marathon are almost complete and quite a few people with race numbers are on their way to registration. I walk past a couple of casinos,

check out the Planet Hollywood parking deck (not an interesting view) and make my way to the Ferris wheel. I want to take a sunset photo of it. But first I have to find an interesting perspective. I finally find it from a mostly empty parking lot, and then it's a matter of waiting and hoping that the clouds catch some light and



Keep Memory Alive Event Center - Las Vegas

the lights on the Ferris wheel are turned on in time. It all works out quite well and so I slowly make my way back to the hotel.

The next morning I leave around 8am and drive to downtown Las Vegas near Fremont Street. There is an art festival



Clark County Government Center - Las Vegas

held there every September where artists are invited to paint some of the houses.

I drive to the intersection of Steward Ave and N 6th St, where I can already see the first mural. While it is a problem to find a free parking space here in the evening,

at this time of day you can park your car on the side of the road without any problems.

The murals are spread over a few blocks to the east and south. So I leave the car where I parked and just walk around. There are a lot of paintings scattered all over the place. The really nice thing about it is that you hardly ever see ugly tags de-

facing the original art. I wish that was the case everywhere. After a while, I think I've seen most of the interesting paintings and head back to my car. I drive around a bit to see if I can find more in the surrounding streets, but I only make one more quick stop.

Not far away is my next destination: the Keep Memory Alive Event Center. This is mainly a brain disorder clinic, but you can also rent part of it for private ventures. But the reason I'm here is not the clinic, but the building itself. It's by American architect Frank Gehry, and like his other buildings (like the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao or the Walt

Disney Concert Hall in LA) it doesn't have straight lines. Coming from the east, it seems small, because directly behind it is the huge block of the World Market Center.



New York New York - Las Vegas



Excalibur - Las Vegas

Just across the street is the Clark County Government Center, which is next on my list. It has a very different style and would fit better in the desert than Las Vegas. Still, it's very photogenic. Unfortunately, I can't get in. Right now they require appointments and also have a Corona test station set

up. So that leaves it on my to-do list.

Now I head to one of the few places on the Strip where you can still park for free, the Fashion Show Mall. The idea is to visit some of the places on the northern part of the Strip that are too far from my hotel to walk. I start with the Wynn/Encore and then move on to the Venetian/Palazzo. So I walk down the Strip to near where I turned around last night, then walk back across the street. I skip Caesars Palace, instead I check out the Mirage and Treasure Island. The times of the sea battle are long gone. But a ship is still docked at the edge of a small pond. In the evening I finish my casino tour with the Excalibur and the Luxor.

All in all, there are not many changes in the last ten years, at least as far as the hotels are concerned. New things are more in the public area like the T-Mobile Arena.

By the way, today is the first day with nice, warm weather. In the afternoon we have 27°C (81°F).

01/02.03 – from Las Vegas to Tucson

Today it will be a long drive. I'm going to Gold Canyon, a small village east of Phoenix. But I will already make a first stop in Boulder City. This is a town that was founded for the workers who built the Hoover Dam. Today it is a nice clean community and the houses or lots are anything but cheap. First I stop at Hemenway Valley Park to see the Big Horn sheep. Unfortunately, they are not there today. The downtown area itself is really nice with lots of statues and some antique stores with even more stuff.



in Boulder City

Next stop is Kingman. I've been here a couple of times. But hey, I'm here anyway and there's always something new to discover.

Now the longest part of the drive to Gold Canyon begins, and there's not much to stop for (except for a short stop to eat some vegetables I brought with me). In Mesa, another town east of Phoenix, I stop briefly at Walmart, and since it's right next door, I also check to see if there's anything of interest at Kohl's. Kohl's

is a department store chain I discovered 4 years ago that seems to have a good balance between price and quality.

I finally reach my destination. The Best Western Hotel is really nice, built in adobe style.

Breakfast is only available from 6–9am, which means I better get to Gold Canyon before I leave. Also, I lost an hour in Arizona, but since I'm still getting up early, it's not really an issue.



in Kingman



in Kingman

Gold Canyon is an artificial western town where they brought old buildings from different places to create a kind of theme park. I've been there twice before, but since it's only a few miles from the hotel, I thought it would be a good idea to go again.

I got there around 7:30 (no point in being there at sunrise, by the way, since it rises behind a mountain peak) and of course, there was no one there except a few people from the adjacent campground. Anyway, the entrance is free 24/7. They make their money from the stores and various attractions.

This time I want to take some pictures with my 12mm lens, but that turns out to be diffi-

cult as they have placed so many ads that many perspectives don't work (at least if you don't want to spend hours removing them in Photoshop). So I switch back to my standard lens and focus on the small details. You can spend hours here and still find something new.

After an hour or so, I head back to the ho-

tel, grab a coffee from the breakfast buffet, and call home.

I take my time drinking the coffee and writing some more on this travelogue.

The drive to Tucson doesn't take long, even if I don't take the direct route. Instead, I take the AZ-177 to Kearny. This is

a mining town founded to relocate people for the expansion of one of the largest copper mines in the world: ASARCO Ray Operation. That's what I want to take a look at.

Unfortunately, they have closed the official lookout, but there are some spots along the road where you can park the car and take a look at the mine. At the moment there is not much going on. It looks like they are mainly maintaining the site. Maybe that's why the lookout is not open. I change lenses and use the full 560mm to fill most of the frame with the huge trucks they are using. But not only the machines are interesting, but also the landscape is nice.

So I continue my drive towards Tucson. But before I get there I pass Biosphere 2. We were there more than 20 years ago

and I want to see how it looks like today. Well things changed quite a bit. The structure itself is of course the same and I remember the stories they told us pretty well (that's why I don't go for a tour by the way). The approach was via a dirt road where we had to drive very slowly in the passenger car we had. Now they are marketing the place extensively



Goldfield Ghost Town



Goldfield Ghost Town



Goldfield Ghost Town

in visitor centers and hotels. They've paved the road, built a big parking lot, and built a visitor center that keeps you pretty far from the building if you're not on a guided tour.

But they also set up some nice tables in the shade where I eat the salad I bought at Walmart yesterday.

02-04.03. – Tucson

After the stop at Biosphere 2, it is still too early to check in at the hotel. So I first drive to the eastern part of Saguaro National Park. We have done that in 2000 before. At that time it was still early in the morning and we (or better I 😊) saw many roadrunners. Now, shortly after noon, I don't expect to see any at all.



ASARCO Ray Operation - Kearny

The drive through the suburbs of Tucson takes longer than expected, but finally, I'm there. In this part of the NP, you are only allowed to drive a relatively small circle, the rest is off-limits. It's a narrow one-way

road, but there are enough pull-outs to stop and take photos. There is also a short turnoff on an unpaved road that leads to a picnic area (Mica View) and some short trails. I take that of course and use the opportunity to stretch my legs a little. Then I have enough. Tomorrow I want to visit anyway the western part of the park and in the Desert Muse-



at Arizona-Sonora
Desert Museum - Tucson

um, which I also want to visit tomorrow, there are more than enough cacti too.

This time I have booked a bed-and-breakfast outside the city and near the desert museum. I get the „Tiny House“, which is a bit apart and really cute. It's 29°C (84°F), I'm just sitting on the terrace writing this trip report. Even when I get back from dinner at 8:30, it's 24°C (75°F). This is what I had hoped for when I plan-

ned the trip to the Southwest.

The next day, the first thing on the agenda is the Desert Museum. The good thing about visiting in winter is that it's not that hot, even though it's quite warm today

(27°C / 81° F) and rising throughout the day), but nothing compared to real summer temperatures. The downside, and it's a big one, is that they don't open until 8:30 instead of 7:30. That means it gets crowded quickly, whereas in the summer you have an hour or so where there are few people. So I enter the grounds 5 minutes after

opening and go straight to the cougar and then the hummingbirds. Another plus when visiting in the winter is the bird of prey show. It starts at 10am, but I'm asked to be there early as it can get crowded. And it is. I got there 20 minutes early and there was already a long queue. When we are let in, we don't enter an amphitheater, we just line up in three rows. The birds fly over our heads from the left and right. Since they fly di-



at Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum - Tucson

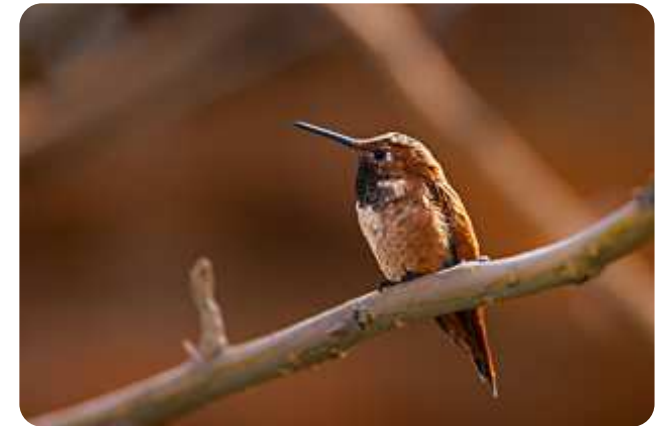
rectly at us, they are difficult to photograph in the air, especially since we are not allowed to hold anything above eye level. The rangers place food on small trees very close to us. This way even people with smartphones can take photos. They don't show a huge variety of birds (nothing compared to Weltvogelpark Walsrode or the bird of prey show



at Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum - Tucson



at Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum - Tucson



at Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum - Tucson

at the Kasselburg). It takes 30 minutes and is certainly quite nice if you don't have a decent camera. Otherwise, it's ok, but nothing to come for. I explore a few more places and pay a second visit to the hummingbirds before I leave. Now I was here already again for 3.5 hours.

Since the mountain area of the Saguaro National Park is just around the corner, I go there next. As in the eastern part, there is also a loop trail that you can drive and that offers various hiking opportunities. Since it is now High Noon, I drive only the loop. This one is completely unpaved and the scenery is not much different from the other part. If you've seen one, you're not missing much by skipping the other. If you ask me, I'd go for the route I was on yesterday.

Since I'm north of Tucson now anyway, I decide to stop by the Tucson Outlets Center. While the outlet in Las Vegas was as it has always been, many stores are unoccupied here. The big brands like Adidas and Nike are there, but many of the others are missing. I would say at least a third of the stores are empty. I can't find anything that interests me either.

Last stop for today is the Saint Augustine Cathedral. It doesn't look special from the outside, and the inside of the

nave is nothing special either (although it does have nice windows). The attraction is the entrance hall facing the street (you can also enter the church from the side). There are some nice murals there in a modern style.

I have two more museums on my „maybe I want to visit“ list, but I decide I'd rather use the terrace of my hotel. Unfortunately, the announced weather change arrives. It becomes quite windy and

the originally blue sky is almost completely covered with clouds. So I move in after 2.5 hours. About an hour later the wind has calmed down and you can see a few patches of sky between the clouds. A good sign for interesting sunset shots. On the way to the hotel, I already scouted possible locations but didn't find any special place. I would have had to hike on one of the trails, hoping for a nice foreground. So I choose the lazy option. There are some nice big cacti in the backyard of my „Tiny House“. I get the tripod out of the car, look for a composition and start photographing.

The next morning I photograph the same cactus, just in the other direction. Sunrise shots can be so easy 😊 .

Shortly after I start my drive to Tomb-



Saint Augustine Cathedral - Tucson

stone. This is an old western town where the famous „Gunfight at the O.K. Corral“ happened. You may have heard of Doc Holliday and the Earp brothers who



in Tucson



in Tucson



in Tucson

On the way back to Tucson I make another small detour to Benson and St. David to photograph the murals and old cars that I saw this morning on

were involved. I'll start at Boothill Graveyard, where you'll find many old graves. Some are simply labeled „unknown“, others with names and notations like „hanged“ or „murdered“. In the center, the old main street has been closed to traffic. Only some carriages are allowed to drive there. This street, but at least partly also the rest, is a kind of Disneyland. I don't know how original the buildings are, but inside you will find only souvenir stores, restaurants and the like. It took me an hour to visit both places, but if you want to see the shooting that takes place several times a day or go shopping, you obviously need more time.



in Tombstone

Now I want to go to Chiricahua NM near Wilcox, which is quite a drive. But since it's off the beaten path, I probably won't get that close. I was actually going to walk the Echo Canyon Trail, but when I arrive, all the parking spaces are taken. I take that as a sign. The temperature is quite pleasant (20°C / 68°F), but there is



Boothill Graveyard - Tombstone

a cold and gusty wind blowing, which is hard to bear even with a fleece jacket. Later on the way back to Tucson, even on the interstate, there are warnings about the strong wind and the associated fire hazard. So I drive back to the entrance and stop at various parking spots to take a few photos.

the way to Tombstone.



in Tombstone

05/06.03 – from Tucson via Borrego Springs to San Diego

Today it will be another long drive. Somehow I have to get back to the Pacific and since there is not so much interesting in between, I will make another stop in Borrego Springs like 4 years ago. As if the direct route wasn't already long enough, I'll also make a detour around the Salton Sea. All in all, the drive should take 7.5 hours.

It is 6 o'clock in the morning and I pack my car. The wind has calmed down, but the temperature has dropped to 6°C (43°F). Since it is Saturday morning, I don't have to worry about the usual traffic jams in Tucson and on the way to Phoenix. The ride is pretty straightforward, but the closer I get to the Califor-

nia border, the more the wind picks up. In Yuma, before I leave Arizona, I fill up the car. In California, the gasoline is immediately between 30 and 50% more expensive.

After a few hours of driving, I reach my first two stops: Slab City and Salvation Mountain. Slab City is an alternative living community where people live mainly in RVs. The part of Slab City that is known to a wider audience is Salvation Mountain, a construction by former artist Leonard Knight, who passed away in 2014.

I was at Salvation Mountain 4 years ago and not much has changed. Some newly decorated cars have been added, but the mountain is starting to deteriorate. They have already closed parts of it and the paint is starting to crumble everywhere.

I turned around here 4 years ago, but today I want to keep going and see what else is interesting in Slab City.

Honestly, not much. Like Salvation Mountain, Jesus and God are called everywhere, but to me, it looks more like a scene from the Mad Max movies.

So I turn around and continue around the lake. Next stop is Bombay Beach.

In the 1950s, celebrities stayed at the luxury resorts on the Salton Sea. The decline began in the 1970s when a warning was issued that the salinity of the lake would soon no longer allow animal life, which eventually came to happen by the early 1980s.

The most interesting thing (apart from the 60's style billboards) are some art installations on the beach. Theoretically, you can even drive down to the beach by

car, and with my Jeep, that probably would have worked. But for what?

By the way, it seems to happen quite often that people get stuck. There are notices whom to call to get help.

The installations are not great art, but they put the normal world in an absurd context with this place. Kind of interesting.

The farther you get to the north of the lake, the greener it gets and I pass some RV parks, although I wonder if anyone really goes swimming in this lake. On the west side of the lake and on the road to Borrego Springs, there are a number of ATVs and SUVs driving offroad. The sand they kick up is picked up by the gusty wind and carried across the road. In some places, you can't see more than 20 yards.



Bombay Beach - Niland



Bombay Beach - Niland



Bombay Beach - Niland

When I arrive in Borrego Springs it is still very gusty and it even starts to drizzle a bit. It's half past one and after checking in at the hotel I eat my salad for lunch, write a bit on this trip report and then decide to see if it makes sense to take photos with all the sand flying around.

It's ok at first – pretty cold because of the wind, but really just a matter of clothing. I start with the area to the left of my hotel. You can drive close to most of the figures. It's off-road, bumpy, and sandy in parts, but most people with passenger cars do it anyway.

Usually, I park my car a bit away from the figure I want to photograph, but of course, I still have to wait until the other cars are out of the picture too.

After a while, I turn around and look for the second area, which is on the other side of the city. In the meantime, the sun has disappeared behind a thick dark cloud. I head to the places I already know, but my enthusiasm is clearly fading. The light is bad, the thick dark cloud on the horizon will prevent a

nice sunset and now the wind is also getting stronger and it starts to rain. Tomorrow I will find that it has even snowed in



Galleta Meadows - Borrego Springs



Galleta Meadows - Borrego Springs

the western mountains. I drive back to the motel and hope that the weather will change overnight.

It is really a pity. I wanted to take some

nice sunset and night sky pictures here. I even brought a small LED lamp to light up the figures. But that's the problem



Galleta Meadows - Borrego Springs



Galleta Meadows - Borrego Springs

with landscape photography. You can plan a lot, but you can't control the weather.

The next morning I leave the motel at 5am. It's still dark, but the sky is cloudless (now I would have liked some clouds



) and it's not too windy. I think about where to go and decide on my favorite sculpture, the Scorpion. The sunrise is quite nice, but nothing special. I wait until the sun turns the mountains red, take a few more photos, and then take advantage of the beautiful morning light for a few more sculptures. I skip the ones I know I already have nice pictures of from my last visit and finally return to the motel to make myself something for breakfast. All in all, I was out for 2 hours.

Unfortunately, my back pain returns. For quite a while I had no more problems, but the long rides over the two days seem to have been a bit too much.

The ride today is not too long, but as I pass the village of Ramona halfway, I see some murals and decide to stop and take a walk. I walk up and down the old town, which takes me maybe half an hour. I'm not sure I

took great photos, but at least some details are worth capturing. As I continue on, I see that the area I was in is only a small part of the city. On the other side, there are shopping centers, stores, and even an Aldi lined up along the main street.

06/07.03 – San Diego

Because of my back pain, I change the agenda and go directly to the hotel. It will be a bit early, but maybe I'm lucky and the room is prepared.

Of course, I'm not. They pretend to be fully booked (which is not true, as I still find out), and the rooms will be ready in



in Ramona

1.5 hours at the earliest. Since the hotel is near the marina, I take a walk and have lunch there. Originally I wanted to walk at the Mission Beach Boardwalk, but here I have at least the car with my stuff in the garage of the hotel.

At 2:20pm I'm back, but have to wait another 30 minutes, which is then pretty much the official check-in time. In the meantime, 6 or 7 parties are already waiting. Finally, the check-in begins.

I will see if I leave for the planned sunset shots on Coronado Island, but it is probably better not to sit and give the back a chance to recover. The plan for tomorrow is just short stays in the car and a few walks. I'm hoping that will work out.

Of course, the pain has not gone in the morning. Sitting straight on a chair is no



Sun Harbor Marina - San Diego

worse than lying or walking, just sitting in the car and driving long distances is a problem.

But that shouldn't be an issue this morning. First stop is Chicano Park, which is a 15-minute drive. Fortunately, all the traffic jams are in the opposite direction. Chicano Park is an area with many murals on the pillars of the San Diego-Coronado Bridge. Since it is a Mexican-American barrio, most of the murals are

related to Mexico. I park a block away, but there are also options right on the streets that cross the park. Since I'm here around 8am, there's not much going on yet. The challenge is more about the sun and not getting too many distractions in the picture. There are still more columns being painted. At least one is scaffolded right now. Since the area is so big and there is so much to see (don't forget to turn around every now and then, since the columns are painted from both directions), I stay here for about three-quarters of an hour.

Next stop is Balboa Park, another 15 minutes drive away. Now, this is more of a park as we understand it, so with lots of greenery. But there are also many beautiful buildings in the middle of the park, which house almost all museums – from classical art to space or automobiles to comics. Unfortunately, they are all closed on Mondays, but I knew that beforehand. Most of the buildings are from the early 20th century, but the style is more historical.

I park in the large central parking lot next to the Air and Space Museum and begin



Chicano Park - San Diego



Balboa Park - San Diego



Old Town Park - San Diego

a walking tour. It's not too crowded on this Monday morning, it's warm enough to wear just a shirt, and I enjoy the walk even though I feel every step. I try to just ignore it because there's not much I can do, and I don't want to take pain pills while I can stand it. I take quite a few photos, but they are

more like I-was-here photos, and I doubt they will make it into a portfolio. Unfortunately, the greenhouse, the most photographed object in San Diego according to a description next to it, is scaffolded. I stay here for two hours, but you can spend the whole day here, even without visiting the museums.

Last stop for the morning is Old Town, the place where the first Europeans settled in what is now California. Nowadays it's a State Park, but I already know it's more of a shopping place than a museum. But it's only 10 minutes to get there and parking is free, so I just give it a try. When I get out of the car, I am afraid that

it is total junk. The stores in the area only sell stuff that is most likely cheap imports from Mexico or China (like wrestling masks). But when you enter the State Park, it gets better. It's still very touristy, but the crap isn't as visible anymore. Instead, pottery or homemade candles are sold here.



Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery - San Diego



Sunset Cliffs Natural Park - San Diego



on Shelter Island - San Diego

After strolling through the area, I decide to eat fish and chips in a Mexican restaurant, which is still inside the State Park – very tasty.

Now I take a break at the hotel to stretch a bit and then drive to Sunset Cliffs Natural Park. If I am already in California, I should have been at least once at the sea. The Sunset Cliffs are also not far from my hotel. As the name implies, this is not really a beach area, even though you can walk down at various spots. But you can walk along the cliffs and enjoy the

view. I won't stay until sunset, though. There is no real foreground and the sky is completely clear. So it would just be the sun sinking into the sea. I walk around for about an hour and leave.

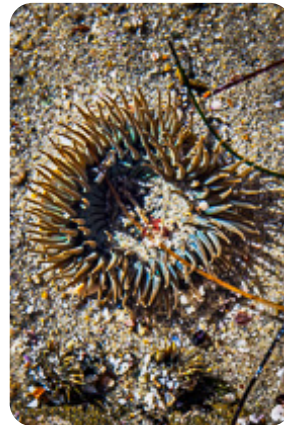
The next morning I wonder what to do. Originally I planned a bigger detour, but with my back problem that's not the best idea. On the other hand, I don't like to

just drive to the next hotel either. Additionally, I would be there way too early to check in.

So I leave the hotel at 10am and drive to nearby Shelter Island to visit the Friendship Bell. It's a quick 5-minute stop and then I continue on to Cabrillo National Monument. This is close to where I was yesterday afternoon, but since it already closes at 5pm, it wouldn't have worked



in La Jolla



in La Jolla



in La Jolla

out to stop by there as well. Since it's a National Monument, I can visit it for free with my annual pass. Whether one is otherwise ready to pay 20 USD for it, everyone must answer himself.

I drive first to the lighthouse – or to be exact: I drive to the parking lot near the visitor center and walk up to the lighthouse. The lighthouse looks nice and you can see some decorated rooms where

the lighthouse keeper lived. From up here you also have a nice view of San Diego and the ocean, but at this time of day it's not really worth taking a photo, and in the evening when the light would be good, the area is closed.

The second place to visit is the tide pools. A road heads down to another parking lot and from there a short trail leads to the tide pool area and then along the

cliffs. I walk down to the pools or what can be seen now. The tide is still too high and only a small part of the area is not underwater. I do have an app that I could have used to check, but waiting another two hours or so would not have been an option anyway.

On the way to the National Monument, I passed the Fort Rosecrans National Ce-

metery. This is a typical military cemetery like you may have seen before. Quite large and beautifully situated with nice old trees. I take a few pictures and drive on.

Now I want to drive north to La Jolla. This is officially a part of San Diego, but still, it is a place of its own. It is not too far away and about 30 minutes later I am there. I

drive straight to the beach and find a parking spot without problems. It is 1pm on a Tuesday and there are still quite a lot of people. I don't want to be here on a weekend

when even the locals come here to spend the day at the beach.

I head to La Jolla Cove first. This is the place not to miss and the reason most people are here. A small colony of seals (about two dozen animals) make their home here and are used to people trying to photograph them. Fortunately, everyone keeps some distance and no one tries to touch them. I change my lens