

Washington DC Trip-2013

I waved out the bus window, and then sat back in my seat, excited and anxious. The bus was driving me along with around 26 other eighth graders to the San Francisco Airport, for a flight that would take us to Philadelphia. The bus was noisy and filled to the brim with excitement and eager voices. I sat in my seat, listening to music to calm my overly excited nerves. I sat across from my roommates: Shreya, Senseerae, and Emily. I didn't really know Shreya and Senseerae, but they seemed friendly, so I engaged in conversation with them while we drove to SFO.

We were all taking off our shoes, pulling out phones, and dumping our backpacks into plastic boxes. It took some time to go through checking in our bags at Terminal 2, and then go through the security check, due to the amount of kids there were, but we managed to get through smoothly. Our boarding passes were distributed, and everyone quickly tucked them into the pouches we were given to put around our necks. Then we all walked to our gate. After switching seats so that everyone was next to whoever they wanted to be, we were allowed to wander the terminal for ten minutes before the plane ride. Immediately, almost everyone dashed for the candy store that was next to our gate. I filled my baggie with chocolate covered almonds, raisins, and gummy worms, before returning to our gate. We boarded our Virgin America plane, and I was shocked to see that it was much fancier than any other domestic flight I had been on. Glowing purple lights illuminated the cabin, and each seat was cloaked in faux leather. The best part was probably the individual TVs in front of each person's seat. I told myself that I needed to sleep, because it was midnight and I wouldn't get any sleep once we landed. After struggling to find a comfortable position, I drifted off into a restless sleep.

We landed in DC at around 7 in the morning...there. Which meant that in California, it was 4:00. I was groggy and cranky but I washed my face, brushed my teeth, and put on my contacts while trying to stay as alert as possible. Then we got our luggage from the conveyer belt and boarded the bus that would stick with us the entire trip. Our tour guide, Kelly, and our bus driver, Tom, greeted us once we boarded the bus. We drove to the Philadelphia Museum of Art to wake up. We ran up the steps, and back down, and I felt refreshed. The air was cold and the wind blew mightily, but it felt invigorating. We all boarded the bus again after taking some pictures, and drove to Hard Rock Café, for breakfast.

At this point, I was starving. We got to the café and we lead into a private room where a small breakfast buffet had been set up for us. I quickly piled on some salty potatoes, soft French toast, sausage, and melon onto my plate, and sat with Emily, Shreya, Senseerae, Manaal, Andrew, Donovan, and Abel. We ate our breakfast, and then got into the bus. Kelly provided some background of Philadelphia, and where we were going: Independence Hall. This is where we saw the room where the Declaration of Independence was written, the place where the delegates mused about the future of America, and where the Constitution was written. Once that was done, we saw the Liberty Bell, which wasn't very far away. We took pictures and then walked in a deconstructed line to an outlet mall. There, we were given vouchers for a \$10 meal. I walked with Senseerae and Andrew to a restaurant, where I decided to get a Philly Cheese Steak in honor of the place we were in. Unfortunately, after a couple bites of the crispy, toasted bread, creamy cheese, and shredded meat, half of my sandwich fell, so I resorted to finishing up my fries. Then, I went to another store in the mall and bought a Philadelphia magnet for our collection. We all met back together and boarded the bus.

Our next stop was the Constitution Center. Don't be fooled by its name; the Constitution itself is in DC, not in Philadelphia. However, the center gave lots of in-depth information about the Constitution, and the making of America. We watched a 5-minute show on the Constitution, and were then given permission to explore the floors for some time. Manaal and I walked around, took pictures, and then met up with Emily and Shreya. After some time we went to the gift shop, the meeting place, and I got a souvenir penny for my collection.

We then walked to the National Liberty Museum. The name may imply more historical artifacts and such, but this museum was actually dedicated to art and news inspired by the image of liberty. There were beautiful spires of glass, twisting sculptures, paintings, and stories that channeled "liberty". In the center of the two-story museum, was a 21-foot glass sculpture entitled the "Flame of Liberty". It was breathtaking; a tall, orange-hued sculpture that resembled flames and reached towards the sky.

After finishing up our tour of that Museum, we went to Franklin Court, where Benjamin Franklin lived. His house isn't there anymore, but his post office is still standing, with some renovations. I saw his printing press, his privy pit (bathroom) ☺, and his signature. (Instead of stamping the mail, he had to sign each one. This was known as 'franking'.)

Once we had gone around his post office, we went back to the bus, and were taken to dinner. Dinner was in a wonderful, quaint Italian restaurant with big windows to let the sunlight pour through and illuminate it. I had cheesy tortellini, salad, and a delicate chocolate mousse tart.

With full stomachs, and contented grins, we all walked back to the bus. By now, most of us were tired, and Miss Milat and Miss Carter were both trying to get us pepped up again. Kelly told some stories and we finally arrived back at the Constitution Center. There, we saw a funny little show with two people acting out history in an engaging, interactive way. We finished up the show and then tiredly made our way back to the bus. We drove to the hotel, where all of us quickly got our hotel key cards and then went up to our room. Emily, Shreya, Senseerae and I all changed into our pajamas, and then went out into the hall to talk to Manaal (who was in another room). At 9:45 we all went back to our rooms and talked for a while. We watched TV, and then went to bed.

The next day we ate breakfast at the breakfast buffet. I plowed through my biscuit, waffle, and fruits, and then we all got into the car for our 2.5-hour bus ride to Gettysburg. Along the ride, most people were asleep, still tired from lack of sleep the day before. At around noon, we stopped at an outlet mall, where we were given \$8 vouchers to buy our lunch. I bought a pizza pretzel, a warm soft pretzel topped with melted cheese, sauce, and pepperoni. We quickly ate and spent the rest of the time shopping at the mall and looking through the stores.

Our first stop in Gettysburg was a museum where saw a cyclorama; a long painting that stretched around a circular room. We then got back onto the bus and were accompanied by a Battlefield Guide who told us about the Battle of Gettysburg, the bloodiest battle in American history that lasted three days. We then saw one of the battlefields. It wasn't much to look at, just a wide expanse of golden brown grass and hills, but paired with the white gray sky, and the cold wind running through the blades of grass, it looked scenic and peaceful. In reality, it was hiding the hundreds of soldiers that died on that very field in 1863. We drove to the small town, and saw Gettysburg Cemetery. I got a Gettysburg magnet, and then we were taken to a small homemade ice cream parlor in town. I enjoyed my mocha fudge ice cream despite the slightly chilly weather. We drove to our new hotel and took showers. At around 7, we were taken to the Dobbin House, one of the oldest buildings in Gettysburg that has been transformed into a small, historical restaurant. We were treated with a dinner buffet of salad, potatoes, green beans, roast beef, and warm rolls. I ate my dinner happily, chatting with my friends, and then ate

dessert-cream pudding and a brownie. A presenter came, and, assuming the role of Abraham Lincoln, recited the Emancipation Proclamation. After that, we took pictures and then saw where slaves traveling on the Underground Railroad were hid in the house. Then we were taken back to the hotel. Once we got there almost everyone went to the indoor pool for half an hour, and then we went back to our rooms for some SLEEP. ☺

We woke up to the sight of snow. The weather had said it was going to snow, but it still surprised me. We dressed warm and then headed downstairs for breakfast. After yogurt, potatoes, and sausage, everyone bundled up as best we could, put our luggage in the bus, took pictures in the snow, and then got into the bus for our 3 hour ride to Washington DC. We stopped at the White House and took pictures, and with the white snow, white sky, and white...house, the scene was gorgeous. But very, VERY cold. We rushed back to the bus after taking pictures, to get out of the harsh wind and snow, and drove to the Holocaust Museum. We were given an hour to explore the museum, and I was disgusted by what I saw. The treatment of the Jews scared and shocked me, and the museum was filled with gross, cruel details of their torture. After going through the museum we got back into the bus where we got a boxed lunch consisting of a turkey sandwich, chips, a cookie, and fruits. We ate it on the way to Mt. Vernon, George Washington's house.

When we got there, the weather still hadn't gotten any better, but the hazy gray skies and the falling curtain rain made for beautiful views. Mt. Vernon sat on the side of the Potomac River, and was two stories. We took pictures from the outside, and then got to see the inside as well, but no photography was allowed indoors. An interesting fact about his house, is that he had twenty one bedrooms in his house. Almost all of them were for guests, and he never charged anyone for seeking board in his home. We then saw George Washington and Martha Washington's tomb.

After touring Mt. Vernon, we went to dinner at Primo's Family Restaurant. Every four people got a pizza, a bowl of spaghetti, salad, plate of chocolate chip cookies, and a platter of fries and chicken fingers. We ate our meal, and then went to Starbucks for a warm drink. Then we got back into the bus, frustrated that the rain had still not let up. We were taken to the Korean Veterans Memorial, and the sight was picturesque. Stone soldiers stood, surrounded by deep green bushes, being pounded on by the unforgiving rain. On the glossy black wall next to the statues, it says "Freedom is not free."

Then we went to the Lincoln Memorial, but by then the rain had become a thick, weaving curtain of water, and it was hard to see through it. We spent some time at his memorial with his huge white statue, and then got back onto the bus.

Next and lastly, we went to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial. It's a law that no statue or memorial sculpture can be taller than 19.5 feet, or the size of Lady Liberty on top of the Capitol, but Martin Luther King was 30 feet. But he was accepted. Why? Because technically, he's a bust. He was not fully carved out from the block of stone. Instead, he's part of the "stone of hope" from the "mountain of despair", a quote he brought up in his famous speech.

We checked into the hotel and shuffled up to our rooms. We took showers, talked, watched TV, and then went to bed.

The next day we woke up late, and rushed to get ready. We ran down for our breakfast buffet and ate. Tuesday was supposed to be full of walking. Our first stop was the Newseum, a museum filled with breaking news from a long time ago up until now. We saw news articles from when Marilyn Monroe was famous, and saw Martin Luther King Junior's jail cell door. I even took a picture with it.

We stayed at the Newseum for some time, and then went to the National Archives, where we saw the Bill of Rights, the actual Constitution, and the Declaration of Independence. The writing was faded, and the paper was thin and weak, but they still manage to hold our country together.

We didn't stay at the national Archives for long. We went to a small souvenir shop next, where I bought myself a sweatshirt, and Leah a rainbow T-shirt. Once everyone had bought their souvenirs, we went to a huge mall for lunch and more shopping. I didn't buy anything except my lunch from Subway and some Dippin' Dots, but it was tempting, with the wide array of stores there were to choose from. After not enough time in the Pentagon City Mall, we walked through the cold wind to the Pentagon. Photography of the actual building was forbidden, so I didn't get it on camera, but I did get pictures of the Pentagon Memorial, where all the brave and innocent souls who died in the 9/11 crash are buried.

Next we went to the Vietnam Memorial, and I was shocked to see the number of people that died in the war. The tall black slabs that formed a right angle were covered with names of the deceased and missing. It made me thoroughly sad to see what wars do.

After the Vietnam Memorial, we went to Franklin D. Roosevelt's Memorial, which was basically a large area filled with rocks, small waterfalls, statues of him and his causes, and his famous quotes. It was a beautiful and inspiring place to visit.

After his memorial, we went to our last one of the day: Thomas Jefferson's. We walked to his memorial, where a tall dark bronze statue of him was standing upright. The Declaration of independence was engraved behind him.

Once we had gotten back onto the bus, we drove for an hour to Medieval Times, a dinner show with horses and jousting that I had seen last year when I went to Disneyland. I didn't find the show very interesting, but it was still fun to watch it with my new friends and eat dinner under bright colored lights while watching stallions and swords in the arena.

We got back late, and I didn't get a chance to call home. I took my shower, and after eating some popcorn, talking with Emily, Shreya, and Senseerae, I gratefully fell asleep.

The last day of the trip was quite sudden. I woke up and felt surprised, relieved, and sad that I would be returning home. We went downstairs, ate breakfast, and then got into the bus for our last day of touring. We went to Arlington Cemetery first. Arlington Cemetery is the burial place of almost all the soldiers. As soon as we got there, I saw hills, covered in rows upon rows of white tombstones. The amount was innumerable. It was tragically beautiful; the perfect little white tombstones marking a life ended too soon in orderly little rows, standing in lines like the soldiers who rest in peace under them. We walked around the cemetery and saw JFK's Memorial, along with Robert E. Lee's house. Then we saw the Changing of the Guard. To tell the truth, it wasn't very exciting to see the guards change.

Next we went to the Capitol building, where we took pictures. Then we walked over to the Supreme Court Building, where a case over gay marriage was being debated. Outside, hundreds of gay marriage supporters and haters were gathered with colorful, expressive posters, and opinions. We walked through the dense mass of people to the Library of Congress, where almost every book ever written has a copy. Next, we separated into groups and chose a Smithsonian to see. I chose the Natural history museum, but looking back, I wish I had chosen the Air and Space Museum, because I didn't see that when we went a couple years ago. It wasn't very interesting to see the same things again, but we looked

around in the small group we were in (Liana, Becca, Kelsey, Donovan, Manaal, and I) and ate lunch as well. Then we met the rest of the groups, who had come from the Smithsonian of their choice. We didn't get enough time to really explore the museum, but we had to leave to see the Iwo Jima Memorial. Once taking pictures and feeling a sense of patriotism looking at the heartwarming statue of Iwo Jima, we got onto the bus for the last time. We were on our way to the airport.

We arrived at the airport and spent *forever* getting through security. Then we were all given a \$10 bill to buy a quick dinner to eat on the plane. I got a pizza pretzel and an Icee, and then boarded the plane with my friends.

DC offered another taste of independence, patriotism, and new connections, but after four tiring but incredibly exciting days, I was ready to go home and share my adventures. And now I have. 😊