

The joys of international travel in 2023.

The Fourteenth of February is a well-known date - Valentine's Day, Decimal Currency (Changeover) day and the date my husband Jim and I headed overseas for the first time since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our last overseas trip was in early 2020 to British Columbia (BC), Canada with the family, skiing with our daughter, son-in-law and 2 granddaughters. We arrived home to go in to mandatory self-isolation for 2 weeks.

Anyway, having had our COVID vaccinations and armed with disinfectant wipes, N95 face masks and hand sanitiser, we set off once again for our happy place, Sun Peaks BC, Canada to ski and test out our new joints.

Waking up at 3.15am for the drive to the airport for our 6am flight to Sydney wasn't exactly fun. The airline check-in took about 30 minutes and the security screening took about the same amount of time, so we ended up boarding pretty much immediately for the first leg of our trip to Sydney. The Sydney to Vancouver flight was scheduled to depart at 12.15pm but was delayed by nearly 90 minutes due to a late arrival. Hmm... that was going to make the connection a bit tight in Vancouver. Our cases had been booked through to our final destination of Kamloops, BC so that was helpful (we thought). I would estimate that no more than 10% of travellers and staff on our flight wore facemasks.

As suspected when we arrived at the gate for our 8.50am flight from Vancouver to Kamloops, we saw the plane backing out. The Air Canada staff suggested we could be put on stand-by for the 1.30 pm flight and kindly provided us with some vouchers for meals. We made a couple of phone calls to let our hotel in Sun Peaks know we had been delayed, as well as to the shuttle company which was to transport us there from the airport. After eating, we waited dutifully at the gate for the 1.30pm flight but, unfortunately for us, everyone turned up and the flight was full. In Adelaide I had purchased some Apple air tags and placed them in our cases before leaving home. To our surprise, we watched on my iPhone as our cases taxied out on the 1.30 pm flight without us.

Back at the Air Canada customer service counter we were told we would be accommodated for the night in a hotel in nearby Richmond, and were provided with an overnight comfort pack. Fortunately we had also packed a few essentials in our "carry-on" luggage (warm clothes, change of underwear and basic toiletries). Directions were provided to get us to the shuttle bus stop. While waiting we were talking to a Canadian couple from Saskatoon. It turned out they were friends of a fellow that Jim worked with at the Waite Institute (now University of Adelaide) in the mid-1970s! Small world.

Richmond is a city about 15 km south of Vancouver where the International Airport is located. We checked in to the Sheraton Hotel then went walking to find something to eat. It was interesting to see the electric vehicle charging points in a car park near our

hotel. Finally, on the longest and probably the least romantic Valentines Day I've ever known and after about 48 hours of travel we got to sleep at 6.30pm in a real bed.



Electric Vehicle charging station in Richmond

The following morning our journey continued, first back to Vancouver Airport, then flight to Kamloops where we were successfully reunited with our cases and met shuttle driver for the 50-minute drive to Sun Peaks.

Sun Peaks is such a beautiful winter wonderland - an alpine village of 1400-1500 permanent residents and around 250,000 visitors over the winter season. It boasts the

second largest ski area in Canada. During the summer season, mountain biking, golf and hiking are very popular.



Part of the golf course

Arriving at Sun Peaks Lodge was like arriving home. We received hugs and a warm welcome from the owners Silvia and Mario, with whom we have developed a lovely friendship with since we first stayed there in 2009 and returned every year since. The pandemic was difficult for them as it was for many businesses worldwide due to lack of international travel. Also, like hospitality and other businesses in Australia, staff shortages were an issue prior to the start of the 2022/2023 ski season. The northern hemisphere ski resorts rely heavily on recruiting young Australians and New

Zealanders to work there during what is our long summer break. These issues were not apparent to us during our 20-day stay.

There was about 90-100cm fresh snowfall during our stay, which provided some challenges to our skiing abilities. Temperatures ranged from about -25°C to -5°C during the day. Our days were filled with a leisurely (slow) start to the day, some skiing, coffee, lunch, maybe more skiing or a walk, spa, dinner, occasionally TV and an early night. On previous visits we have snow-shoed, dog sledged and because we have had a hire car, taken a drive to Kamloops to an ice hockey game. This year we watched quite a lot of the Curling Championships on TV.



Covered Bridge (Sun Peaks)

On 6 March, it was time to farewell Silvia and Mario and the beautiful municipality of Sun Peaks for the journey home. With disinfectant wipes, hand sanitiser and N95 masks we got the shuttle to Kamloops airport – uneventful. Flight to Vancouver – uneventful. Seven-hour layover in Vancouver Airport – boring and Jim saying he felt very tired. Was it because of his overdoing the skiing the day before? Flight from Vancouver to Adelaide – tiring. I sat in the same row as a man from Manitoba who was going to Melbourne for a couple of months to visit his son and grandsons. He told me about hunting moose and that he only shoots 1 per season which provides his family with about 400kg of meat. On landing in Sydney he packed up his hunting and shooting magazine and joined us as we navigated immigration, baggage collection, customs, security and transfer to the domestic terminal.

Both of us were feeling pretty tired by the time we made it back to Adelaide, collected our car and drove home. Thought we might both do COVID Rapid Antigen Tests that afternoon, and.... Yes we were both positive. And so for another period of isolation.