

Canadian Couple Finds Metro System is an E-Ticket to Southland Adventure

By JOHN COX

In Los Angeles, the city where the automobile is king, we chose to get around by public transit.

This is not something recommended by most guidebooks. Even some locals thought we were daring. But my wife, Joan, and I had successfully used public transportation in places like London, Hong Kong and Copenhagen, so why not Los Angeles?

Our first experience with the LA transit system was several years ago when we had an afternoon to kill at Los Angeles International Airport. We took the bus to nearby Venice Beach and had a great time.

Encouraged by this experience, we thought we'd explore a little farther on a recent more extended trip. Our base was an apartment in Redondo Beach (or Redundant Beach as we nick-named it after seeing the unbroken miles of sandy shoreline).

We got there easily by bus from LAX. Frequent shuttle buses connect the airport terminal with a nearby transit center. The free shuttles also go to a Metro Green Line rail station where it is possible to catch a train to downtown and northern or eastern points.

Our first excursion was to the Getty Center in Brentwood. This turned out to be a perfect day trip. Actually, it may be best to go there by transit since parking is scarce at the museum and must be reserved days in advance.

Next, we traveled to the city center where we visited the Grand Central Market, rode the Angels Flight Railway, and took the Metro Blue Rail line and bus to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Another successful and enjoyable trip.

Now we were ready to venture farther afield — to Long Beach (Aquarium and the Queen Mary) and south along the coast through Huntington Beach, Balboa, Newport Beach and Laguna Beach. If we hadn't lingered over coffee and lunch, we could have gone all the way to San Clemente and back.

Our last day trip was to the wonderful Huntington Museum in Pasadena. And with only one transfer in downtown Los Angeles.

Admittedly, our goal was not to see all of the sights in the Los Angeles area. We were there from rainy Vancouver for a mid-winter sun break. But, when we tired of walking or biking along the miles of level coastal bike paths, or when the weather turned wet or too hot, it was fun to go sight-seeing.

As with using public transit anywhere, it is essential to plan ahead. Fortunately, that was easy. We pre-planned most of our trips on the Internet before we left home. The Los Angeles Metro Transit system has an excellent website — www.mta.net — where you enter your starting point, your destination, and when you want to leave or arrive.

It tells you what bus to take, when and where to catch it, where to transfer and get off, and even where to walk to get to your exact destination address. The same information is available by telephone (1-800-COMMUTE).

Timetables for specific routes also can be picked up at transit and tourist information offices and on the bus. And, generally, drivers are extremely friendly and helpful as are



Traveling light, Joan Cox of West Vancouver, B.C., hops aboard a local bus heading for the Los Angeles International Airport. Author John Cox's e-mail address is jcox@planeteer.com

other passengers who are quick to tell you where to get off (in the nicest way).

Seeing LA by public transit worked well for us but it probably wouldn't suit others, such as families with children bent on seeing Universal Studios, Disneyland and Knotts Berry Farm.

As in other cities, it requires time, patience and a sense of adventure. What is not needed is a lot of money. Seniors like us can travel all the way from Hollywood to San Clemente — half way to San Diego — for less than two dollars return!

Of course, when we returned home, we used Translink to get from the airport to West Vancouver (a trip now made faster and easier by the new Airport Station connection).

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story, about one Canadian couple's vacation adventures using Los Angeles' Metro system, originally appeared in the Vancouver Sun.

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