

Avoided Trips: Memorable Tourism Experiences Lost

By David M. Brudney, ISHC, May 2008



Several weeks ago Karen reminded me that we were scheduled to attend a grand niece's Colorado wedding over Memorial Day weekend.

"We're going to do *what* over Memorial Day weekend?" I said. "I'm going to stand in yet another long security line? Squeezed into an aging aircraft with no doubt late departure, lousy service, no free snacks, and probably charged extra for luggage?"

I was so looking forward to a quiet, relaxing, stress-free weekend at home, firing up the barbecue, having a few brews and catching up with my reading.

I pride myself on being a positive, "glass half full" kind of guy, but I had to admit that the very last place I wanted to be this past Memorial Day weekend was traveling out of state and dealing with crowded airports and airplanes and all the stress associated with what historically has been one of America's busiest travel weekends.

Frustrations with airlines, airports and security lines contributed to U.S. consumers putting off 41 million flights during the past year, according to the Travel Industry Association. TIA claims that those "avoided" trips cost the U.S. economy \$26.5 billion over the past 12 months - - including lost sales for airlines and travel related businesses as well as lost tax revenue.

But they cost travelers much more in memorable tourism experiences lost.

City general funds notwithstanding, those most affected by these avoided trips are the ones that can least afford it: airline crews, restaurant wait people, hotel bell staff and room attendants and car rental agents.

Media have been feeding us nothing but bad news for tourism and the hospitality industry for months now: airline bankruptcy and potential mergers, rising fuel prices resulting in fewer flights and higher fares, \$4 plus a gallon at the gas pump causing motorists to stay

closer to home and survey after survey telling us U.S. consumer confidence in the economy is the lowest it's been in decades.

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“Of course, sweetheart, we're going to the wedding. It's the right thing to do. I'm really looking forward to it,” I said.

When the day of departure arrived I had conditioned myself just as I had done with recent root canal work and total hip replacement surgery. “Bring it on,” I said as we drove to the airport at 4:15 a.m. to catch an early flight to Denver. I had my game face on and I was ready for the worst.

“What airline?” I asked. “Frontier, it's a direct flight and I got us a really good fare,” Karen replied. My game face and resolve were being tested now. I thought to myself, Frontier filed for bankruptcy maybe two months ago, what was Karen thinking? I wondered how safe the plane would be and, with that low fare, if we'd be stuck in window or center seats. Stop being such a negative nabob, David. Think positively!

Karen always books our flights and hotel accommodations when we take pure leisure trips together and so I was pleased to learn that although we weren't using our earned miles to upgrade to first class, she was able to get coach aisle seats in the same row.

The first sign that things might go well on this trip was when I saw empty stalls in the Terminal 2 parking lot. It got better. We dropped our one bag each at the curbside skycap stand with very little wait time - - and better yet, the skycap was genuinely grateful for our tip. We whisked through security in just a few minutes and were delighted to learn that the flight was still on time for departure.

The flight was smooth, coach was full but comfortable. The flight attendants had great attitudes and were very visible and attentive throughout the near two hour trip.

Getting even better, we arrived in Denver early and in relatively short and seamless fashion we retrieved our luggage and the Hertz shuttle delivered us to our rented car. Where were the crowds, I kept asking myself? Did everyone stay at home?

A classic wedding in Loveland, CO

The drive north from Denver International seemed much shorter than last time, probably due to the relatively new toll road. We cancelled our hotel reservations and opted to stay with family in Loveland. After a nice visit with our hosts and a very short nap (very little sleep the night before), we all left for the rehearsal dinner.

The rehearsal dinner turned out to be a “Colorado luau” held in a spacious back yard at the home of the parents of one of the bridesmaids. Nearly 100 family and friends gathered outdoors on a beautiful Colorado evening in the foothills of the Rockies.

The wedding next day was held at a private estate - - sculpting icons George and Mark Lundeen's 30 acre "country club" outside Loveland - - on the banks of the Big Thompson River that runs through the property dotted with Cottonwood and Willow trees. Turns out the groom's parents were good friends of the Lundeen brothers who made the property available.

The only thing missing from the Lundeen's place was a golf course. Guests were allowed to wander the grounds that included original sculptured art works everywhere, tennis and basketball court, trampoline, horseshoe pit, an old fashioned swing suspended from a tree and even a fish pond.

Bookending the property was a horse barn, training facility and pasture located at one end and at the other end a two story remodeled home built originally in 1912. Mark Lundeen told me the house was built by one of the landscape architects commissioned by President Teddy Roosevelt when Roosevelt established the National parks system. That architect, according to Mark, also planted on the grounds every type of tree indigenous to that part of Colorado for all future generations to see and experience.

I learned the Lundeen brothers are responsible for Loveland becoming a sculptured art center. In fact, the largest assembled group of sculptors and sculpture in the United States are showcased at the Loveland Sculpture Invitational Show & Sale. 300 artists display more than 3,000 sculptures during the annual event held in August.

A family weekend wedding that could not be duplicated again

We visited with our grand niece and with family and many new friends as everyone celebrated and danced into the night. It was a wonderful time and occasion for us to spend quality time with all of our Colorado family - - so appreciative of our making the trip you would have thought we had traveled half-way around the world!

I couldn't help but think of how close we came to missing out on this magnificent bonding and cultural experience. It would have been so easy to have taken a pass and stayed home. And look what we would have missed - - a family weekend wedding that could not be duplicated again.

Everything was perfect on the return trip - - car rental return, check in, very short security line and a very smooth, on time flight home. Who knows, maybe it was just pure luck?

During our flight home I vowed never again to allow "stress", "inconvenience" and "media bad news" to influence our travel decisions. Should future travel decisions come down to "costs", I will weigh heavily the value received and the memories gained from family bonding, education, culture and overall experience.

This particular family wedding experience in Colorado was priceless.

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