



These are trees.

I chose this photo for the cover because I did a lot of hiking in North America, which I've discovered is just walking, but for some reason it's called hiking when done

in hilly terrain. I hiked all over the place, including Yosemite National Park, the Grand Canyon, and the Hollywood Hills.

As expected, Canada was gorgeous. There are lots of pretty nature things to look

at and all the people are ridiculously nice.

Behind Germany, it's also the number two country for impressive beards, which is always a plus in my book.

Thanks for reading my little

updates this year. I've had a lot of fun putting them together, from selecting photos to rehashing funny moments and finding humour in the challenges, it's been a time consuming but rewarding exercise.

Though I've returned home (with no money, I might add), I'm already planning my next big trip. If anyone's interested in seeing Central America, South America or Antarctica in 2015, let me know!

New York I New York

There is no combination of words that can accurately convey how great New York City is. So, I'll just settle for: it's totes amazeballs.

I threw my budget out the window when I landed in New York City. Rather than spending my nights in and living on cheese sandwiches, I blew a heap of cash on

tickets to Broadway, the Museum of Modern Art, a Mets game, and the **viewing platform** at 30 Rock.

My decision between the **top of the Rock** or the Empire State Building was a difficult one. Luckily, I received some good advice from a local, who, in a heavy New York accent, pointed out that "the Empire State

Building is the most iconic structure in New York. But if you're *on top* of the Empire State Building, you can't see the Empire State Building."

He was missing his two front teeth, but he seemed like a smart man.

Apart from the pricey stuff, some free and cheap activities I did in NYC include: riding the Stanton

Island Ferry, walking across Brooklyn Bridge, wandering around Central Park, visiting Carrie Bradshaw's stoop, and eating cupcakes at Magnolia Bakery.

That was all lovely, but one of the best days I had in New York was hanging out with my friend Dom in Long Island, who I met (along with his wife, Claire) exactly five

years ago in Europe.

During our day, Dom took me to a batting cage to try hitting some baseballs. I say try because I hardly hit any.

Fortunately (for you, not me), Dom videoed one of my attempts. If you're in need of a laugh, **click here**.

My favourite part is when I try to kick a ball away, miss, and almost slip over on it.





New York I Continued

I'd hoped that I would run into famous people on every corner in NYC, but in the end I only had one, slightly embarrassing, celebrity sighting during my ten days. I was jogging beside the Hudson River one morning when I collided with a bearded Ashton Kutcher (the

best kind of Ashton Kutcher there is). After an awkward pause I said an embarrassed "sorry, Ashton Kutcher" and shuffled on.

Smooth, Emma, real smooth. Though I didn't see many celebrities, I did stumble across a lot of film sets. **One in particular** was set up around the corner from my

hotel. After walking past the set everyday I somehow ended up getting involved as an extra. I'm not sure if my footage made the final cut, but if you saw a tall ginger girl in the background of a Christmas episode of Law and Order SVU, it was very likely me.

I timed my visit to NYC so I was there for 11 September,

and I wanted to participate in a commemorative event.

With most events closed to the public or sold out I settled on attending a memorial service at St Patricks Cathedral. I'm not religious, but I was happy to sit through the service and pay my respects.

Unfortunately I only made it

halfway through the priest's evangelical opening, leaving shortly after he aggressively informed the congregation that "the wrath of God will be felt by the disobedient".

I made up for it a few days later when I visited the **9/11 Memorial**; a beautiful tribute to the people who lost their lives when the twin towers went down.

Toronto I Canada

I've met a few Torontonians this year, who've all been pretty insistent that Toronto is the best city in the world. I can't say I agree, but fortunately for me I had some incredibly decent locals to stay with while I was there, who showed me only the best bits.

Jeff, a travel buddy from India, planned a fantastic Toronto highlights weekend that included the Hockey Hall of Fame, Second City comedy club, and CN Tower. Jeff also took me to my first ice hockey game to see the Toronto Maple Leafs play the Buffalo Sabres.

For my Australian friends, the Maple Leafs are the Collingwood of North American hockey. Though, unfortunately for the Maple Leafs, they don't enjoy the success the Magpies do.

Ice hockey's physical reputation preceded it, and the game didn't disappoint. Beautifully choreographed hockey play was punctuated

by regular tom thuggery, and at one point every player on the ice was locked in battle with an opponent. Even the goalies had dropped their gloves, which I'm told is rarer than Tony Abbott keeping an election promise.

After our action-packed weekend I prepared to catch the bus from Jeff's place in Waterloo to the city.

"Are you sure you'll be alright catching the bus?" Jeff asked.

"Jeff, considering all the cities I've successfully caught a bus in this year, I'm sure I'll be fine," I replied, with foolish confidence. I walked to the bus stop, purchased a ticket from the machine and waited...and waited. Buses (the only ones to the city) were meant to drive by every twenty minutes, but after two hours it was clear I wouldn't be catching one today.

I lugged my gear back to Jeff's place where we had a good laugh about it. Who'd've thought that the worst public transport I'd encounter this would be in Canada?





Toronto | Canada

Toronto has two pages thanks to the overwhelming generosity of Ron and Anita, two travellers I met in Asia.

When I told them I was coming to town I received an email back straight away with an amazing five day itinerary around Ontario, including an unforgettable

day at Niagara Falls, an overnight trip to Ottawa, and a trip to the McMichael Gallery to see an Ansel Adams exhibition (one of my favourite photographers).

As amazing as it all was, the highlight of my stay with Ron and Anita was a trip to Georgian Bay.

Throughout our forty days in Asia, all Ron talked about

was his “little piece of paradise” in Georgian Bay, and I was stoked to be able to see what he was talking about six months later.

We started our drive to Georgian Bay early, with Ron, Anita, myself, and fellow Asia traveller, Ray. It was a beautiful two hour drive. The roads were lined with walls of green trees,

with splashes of orange and red indicating the start of the autumn colour change.

“You’re about two weeks too early for the colours,” Ron said, disappointed for me.

When we arrived we ate a quick lunch before jumping in Ron’s boat and **buzzing around the bay.**

After thirty minutes we

docked at one of the islands to explore some **hiking trails.** A few hours, one snake and countless chipmunks later, we jumped back on the boat and cruised back to the trailer.

To top off a perfect day, on the way home we stopped at a waterside restaurant to enjoy some beer, pizza and a beautiful **sunset.**



Vancouver | Canada

The first thing that hit me about Vancouver is how damn pretty it is. It feels like a blend of my two favourite Australian cities: Hobart and Melbourne. It has the easy, big city living that I love about Melbourne, with the natural beauty of my hometown, Hobart.

In September it also had the cool climate of Hobart, so I decided to keep warm with some physical pursuits, including hikes through Pacific Spirit Park and **Stanley Park**, and a few runs around the **seawall**.

The most difficult physical challenge I attempted was the "Grouse Grind" track up the face of Grouse Mountain,

which is a badge of honour among locals. After cycling 600km around Cuba, I thought it would be a good test of my fitness.

I started strongly, passing fellow hikers and wondering why it takes people over an hour to complete. "It's only three kilometres", I thought.

Just over half way the track got steeper, my legs

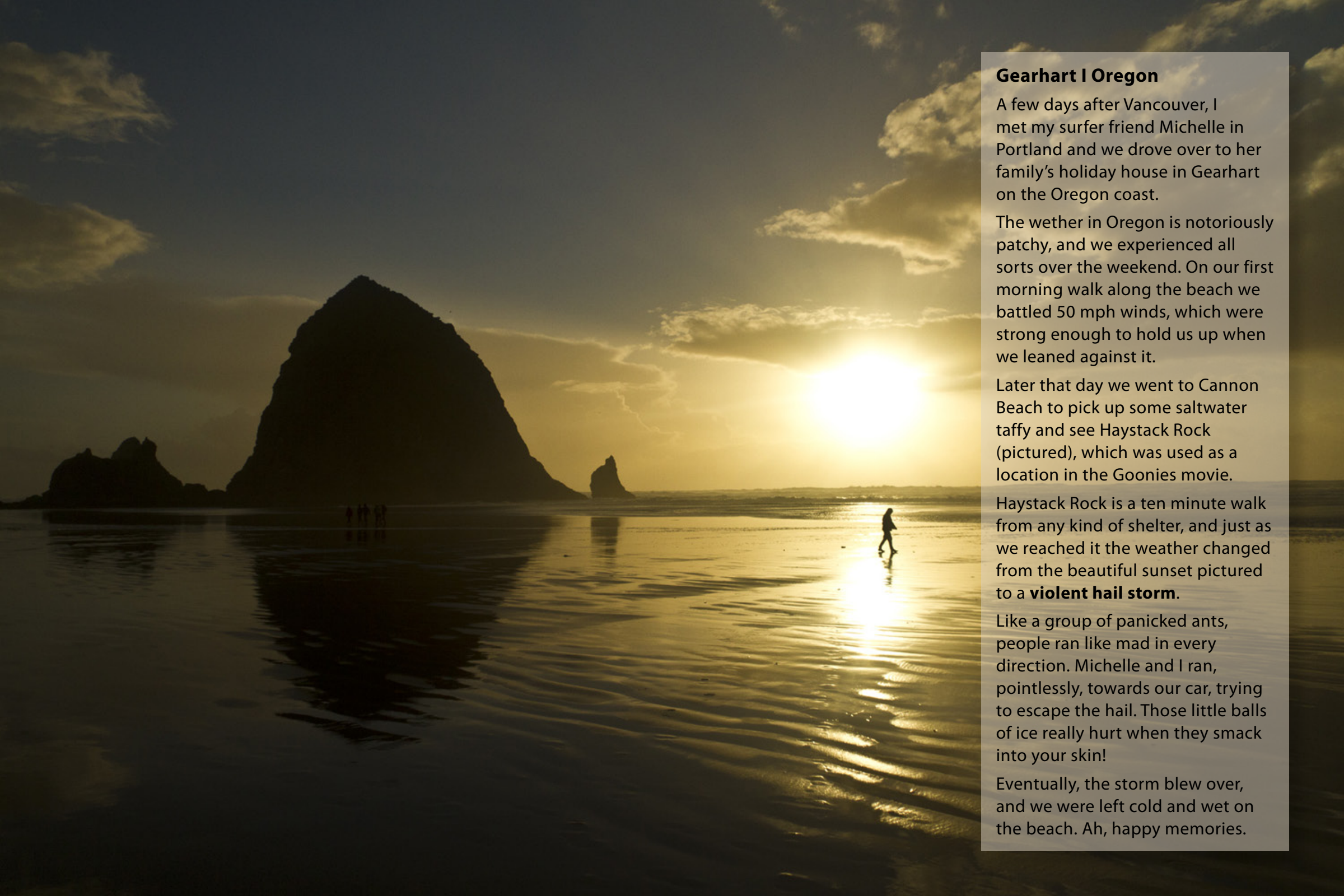
started burning, and my chest started heaving. Soon enough I had to stop.

As I paused and looked at the vertical track ahead of me, a man, no younger than 60, bounded past. "Chin up! The third quarter's the hardest part. Keep going!".

I admired the gentleman's enthusiasm and phenomenal fitness, but, at the time, all I

could think was: "smart arse". After my quick reprieve I pulled myself together and progressed through the rest of the track, albeit a little slower than before.

I finally made it to the top in a time of 70 minutes to enjoy the view of **foggy Vancouver**, and a mean veggie burger at the café, as my reward.



Gearhart | Oregon

A few days after Vancouver, I met my surfer friend Michelle in Portland and we drove over to her family's holiday house in Gearhart on the Oregon coast.

The weather in Oregon is notoriously patchy, and we experienced all sorts over the weekend. On our first morning walk along the beach we battled 50 mph winds, which were strong enough to hold us up when we leaned against it.

Later that day we went to Cannon Beach to pick up some saltwater taffy and see Haystack Rock (pictured), which was used as a location in the *Goonies* movie.

Haystack Rock is a ten minute walk from any kind of shelter, and just as we reached it the weather changed from the beautiful sunset pictured to a **violent hail storm**.

Like a group of panicked ants, people ran like mad in every direction. Michelle and I ran, pointlessly, towards our car, trying to escape the hail. Those little balls of ice really hurt when they smack into your skin!

Eventually, the storm blew over, and we were left cold and wet on the beach. Ah, happy memories.

San Francisco | California

After the gloomy west coast weather I'd experienced so far, San Francisco's sunshine was a welcome change.

As my plane approached the city, I looked through clear skies at the beautiful San Francisco Bay and let out a little squeal when I saw the

Golden Gate Bridge.

It was embarrassing to squeal like a five year old girl, but I was happy that travel hadn't squelched my excitement for a new city.

I was picked up at the airport in a BMW convertible driven by Harr; another acquaintance from Asia.

We went straight to Berkley University so I could tick off the third North American sport on my list: **football**.

Walking into the ground I was greeted by the sound of a marching band pumping Bruno Mars' "Locked out of Heaven", while on the field scantily clad cheerleaders were flicking their hair and

gyrating their hips in sync.

Harr seemed disappointed to hear that AFL football games don't have gimmicks like marching bands or cheerleaders (he was especially disappointed about the cheerleaders).

After the game we drove four hours to Yosemite

National Park to prepare ourselves for a day of hiking. It was a long way to drive for one day of hiking, but, boy was it worth it.

Our five hour return hike took us through luscious woods and past trickling waterfalls to the **summit**, where we enjoyed sweeping views of the National Park.



San Francisco | California

There's an endless supply of things to do in San Francisco, and I spent a lot of time walking around the city seeing it all (with the occasional lift from a cable car to get over the hilly bits).

Actually, I had a funny experience with a cable car as I was walking along the waterfront one day.

I was on my way to Fisherman's Village and noticed a cable car with a big "City of Melbourne" logo on the side. I'd just booked my flight back to Australia, so thoughts of home were fresh in my mind. Seeing the familiar gold logo on the green tram caused a short circuit in my brain, and for ten seconds I had absolutely no idea where I was. "Am I in Melbourne now," I kept thinking.

Long term travel can do some funny things to your head.

Disorientation aside, my top two picks of the San Fran attractions are the Academy

of Sciences and a tour of Alcatraz Island.

The Academy of Sciences is the perfect stop for the traveller on a budget. Can't decide whether to go to the museum, zoo or aquarium? No worries! The Academy of Sciences has a little bit of everything, including an indoor rainforest, earthquake room, shark tank and "living roof". Oh, and penguins!

The tour of **Alcatraz Island** is also an excellent experience. Alcatraz has an interesting history as a fort, military prison, state prison, federal prison and protest site. I'm not usually a fan of audio tours, but this one does an excellent job of telling the island's stories in an interesting and engaging way.

I also had the opportunity to leave the city for a couple of days to stay with the fabulous and outrageous Orny (pictured). It's always a good time with Orny, and I spent a great weekend eating, drinking and hiking around the Sonoma Valley with him.



Las Vegas I Nevada

After San Francisco I stepped into the time and money black hole of Las Vegas, where I never knew what time it was because there are no freaking clocks. Anywhere.

Las Vegas is an alternative universe where you can

drink anywhere outside and smoke anywhere inside. I'd always thought oxygen bars were frivolous, but the abundance of them in Vegas Casinos is actually necessary in order to maintain regular oxygen supply to tourists.

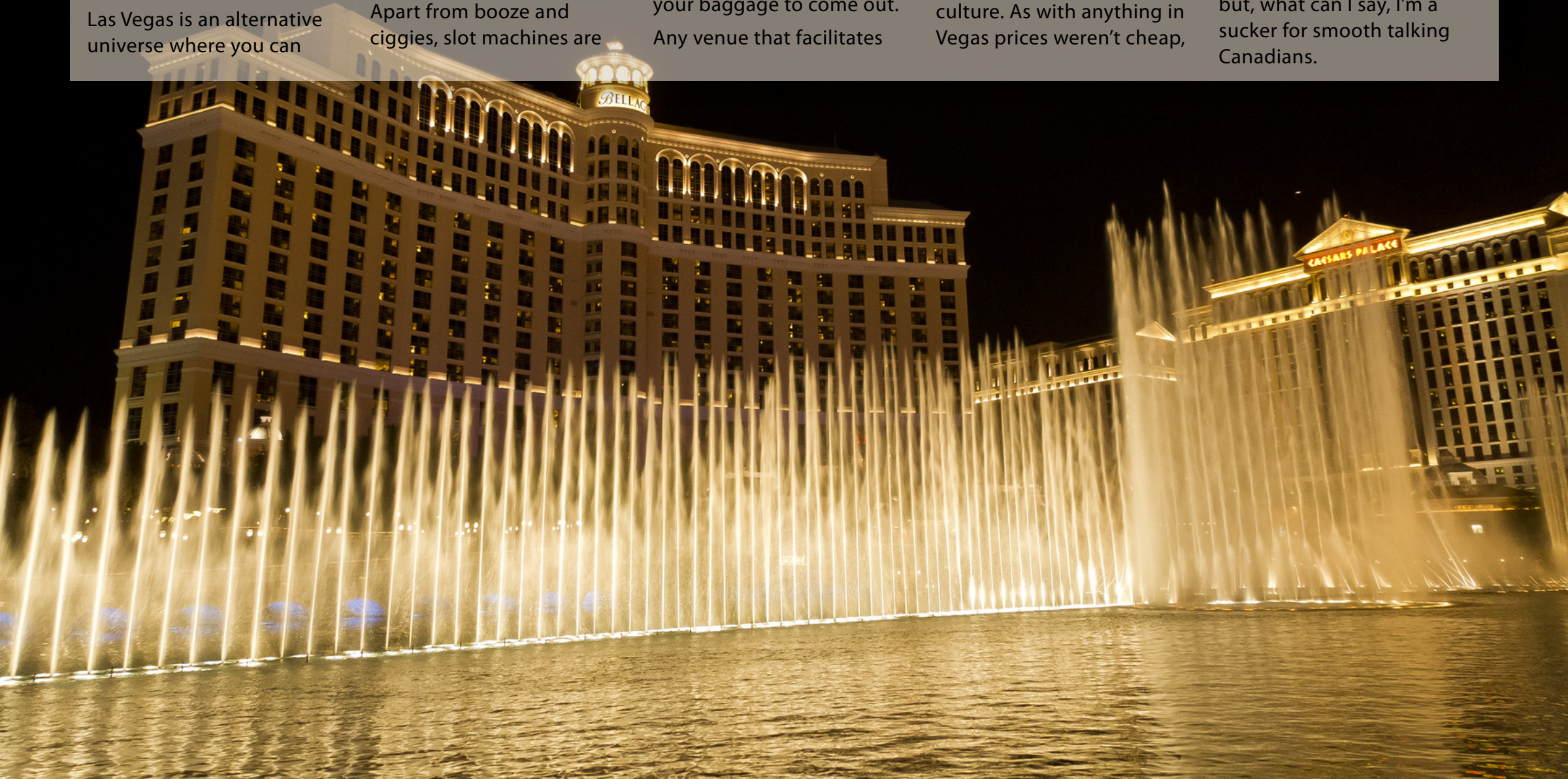
Apart from booze and ciggies, slot machines are

also everywhere. There are slot machines in 9/11 stores, pharmacies, service stations, and churches. There are even slot machines at the airport so you can have a quick flutter while you wait for your plane to board or your baggage to come out. Any venue that facilitates

gambling is required to own a casino licence, so there are over 2000 registered casinos in Vegas.

I'm not really a gambler, so I decided to check the entertainment guide and invest my money in some culture. As with anything in Vegas prices weren't cheap,

and I ended up dropping a couple of hundred dollars on a ticket to Cirque du Soleil's *Love* show, and to see Michael Buble play at the MGM Grand. I realise I've taken a chance by revealing my like for Michael Buble, but, what can I say, I'm a sucker for smooth talking Canadians.



Grand Canyon I Arizona

After a couple of days in Vegas I was fed up with the lights, concrete and all you can eat meat buffets,

so I booked a day trip to the south rim of the Grand Canyon. The five am wake up call and four hour drive were about as welcome as a crying baby on a plane,

but it was worth it to spend three hours walking along one of the natural wonders of the world, the third I've seen this year (depending on which list you follow).

Three hours was just enough time at the canyon. While the vastness is impressive, the view doesn't really change that much and gets a bit repetitive; at 277 miles

(446 km) long and up to 18 miles (29 km) wide, you could walk for a week and still be looking at red rock. Still, this was a nice spot to eat lunch.



Los Angeles I California

I finished my North American tour, and my year of travel, in the sprawling city of Los Angeles.

I'm sure it's a lovely place to live, but, as a traveller who prefers to tour by foot, I found it difficult to fit in everything I wanted to see during

the week I was there.

In light of this, LA is one of the few cities where I felt a cheesy "hop on, hop off" bus tour was warranted. I don't have anything against these tours, I just find that seeing a city at my own pace from the sidewalk is much more interesting than dodging tree branches at the top of

a double decker.

I'm glad I bought a ticket in LA, though. In one day I managed fit in breakfast at the Roosevelt Hotel, seeing my favourite stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, stalking celebrities at Chateau Marmont, music history and legend at the Viper Room, more celebrity

stalking in Beverly Hills, and some archaeology and history at the Lebrea Tar Pits.

I also stopped off to do a lap of Rodeo Drive, which always reminds me of a scene from one of my favourite movies. No, not **THAT** scene. **This one.**



Los Angeles | California

Hollywood was fun, but my favourite place in LA was Venice Beach.

Firstly, it's a beach, which is always a good start with me. Secondly, I really loved the mix of people. Craft stalls line the promenade with vendors spruiking their wares, music blares from the speakers of buskers and beachside restaurants, tightrope walkers practise

their balance between the palm trees, muscled men work out in tiny costumes and pose for photos at "Muscle Beach", and countless exercisers run, roller blade and cycle along the pavement.

Due to my "I have to see everything in LA" schedule, I was only planning to spend a morning at Venice Beach, but I ended up staying the whole day to enjoy the atmosphere,

watch the sunset, and eat from as many food trucks as possible. I ended up jumping on the last bus back to the city somewhere around midnight.

On the last day of my trip I abandoned my plans of going to Universal Studios and opted for the Getty Centre instead. My brain was racing with too many thoughts to keep up with, and being surrounded by loud noises and small

children didn't sound like a good idea given how scatty and impatient I was feeling.

It turned out to be a very good decision.

The Getty Centre is an architecturally stunning gallery in the Santa Monica Mountains that boasts a beautiful collection of art, delightful gardens, and the **best view in LA.**

After a few hours at the Getty I felt sufficiently

cultured and left to prepare for my last international flight of the year.

At 10.00pm I boarded a Qantas jet bound for Sydney, slightly overwhelmed by the abundance of Australian accents that surrounded me. As I sat in my seat the man to my right held out his hand, "G'day, I'm Michael".

Then it hit me: it's really happening, I'm going home!





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- **UK, Spain and France**
- **Cuba**

A huge thank you to all the lovely people (like Ron, pictured) who played a part in my year.