



THE DISPATCH

Official Publication of the Philadelphia Division
Mid-Eastern Region
National Model Railroad Association



July 2023

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Volume 30, No. 5

Jersey to Host Special Summer Joint Meet

On Saturday August 5th, 2023 the New Jersey Division will host a special summer joint meet with both the Philadelphia Division and the Garden State Division (of the NER). Below is a link to the flyer describing all of the information and details about the meet. The same flyer appears on page 3 of this issue.

https://mcusercontent.com/81e26e9e5e482f007b8a43b08/files/0b0a1938-9842-5877-b296-4ed53355edd3/special_meet_flyer_2.pdf

The location will be the recreation building at Switlik Park in Hamilton Township, NJ. This is the location where the Directions and maps on page 4.

Jersey Division usually holds their March meet. Many Philly members have attended our meet here in the past and should be familiar with the venue. Directions and maps can be found on page 4.

Activities will include clinics, white elephant sales, AP judging, popular vote contest (TBD), model showcase table, raffle and door prizes, free table, guest speaker, and a few open layouts in the late afternoon. This will be an

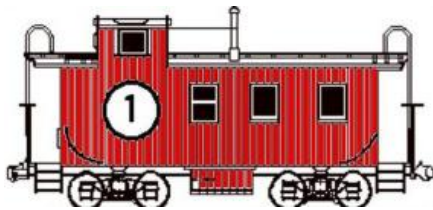
all-day affair, 9:30-4pm with a \$2 hoagie lunch available. Admission is free.

The guest speaker is John Kilbride who will be doing a presentation on the Camden and Amboy Railroad.

There will be a total of four clinics given and at this time we have an open spot for a clinician. If anyone in the Philly Division would like to present a clinic, please contact New Jersey Division Assistant Superintendent Mike Prokop (njwrr@aol.com).

As mentioned, the guys from the Garden State Division have also been invited, so it'll be a great opportunity to connect with them. The New Jersey Division is looking forward to running their first ever special summer meet, and hopes some of their friends from the Philadelphia Division will be able to join them.

NOTE: Please RSVP to Mike Prokop via email with "Special" in the subject line at njwrr@aol.com. We need to how many will be attending for planning purposes, especially for lunch.



Planning Ahead – Division Meets & Other Upcoming Events

August 5, 2023 Special New Jersey Division Joint Meet Switlik Park 5 Fischer Place Hamilton Township, NJ 08620	August 20–26, 2023 NMRA Convention "Texas Express" Gaylord Texan 1501 Gaylord Trail Grapevine, TX 76051	September 9, 2023 Philadelphia Division Meet College Settlement Day Camp 590 Witmer Road Horsham, PA 19044
October 19-22, 2023 MER Convention "Round the Curve to Altoona" Altoona Grand Hotel 1 Sheraton Drive Altoona, PA 16601	November 11, 2023 Philadelphia Division Meet Brandywine Town Center 4050 Brandywine Parkway Wilmington, DE 19803	December 9, 2023 Philly Division/GATSME Train Show Cannstatter Volksfest–Verein 9130 Academy Rd. Philadelphia, PA 19114

Check <http://www.phillynmra.org/regional-timetable> for links to these and other upcoming events.



From the Editor's Desk

Welcome to another “extree” edition of *The Dispatcher*. I hope everyone is enjoying their summer. This is an abbreviated issue which will serve to provide information on the upcoming special joint meet being hosted by the New Jersey Division. Both the Philadelphia Division and the Garden State Division (of the NER region) have been invited.

In addition, I have a backlog of Kevin Feeney’s travelogues (the only backlog I have—so keep those articles coming!) so I thought I’d put out some reading material for those vacation times where you need a break from the family or when you’re not preoccupied with other activities. These are his Middle East trips, so prepare yourself for some exotic adventures. Enjoy!

Howard

THE DISPATCHER

Submissions: *THE DISPATCHER* welcomes any model railroad- or railroad-related material. Members are encouraged to send in articles, letters to the editor, reviews, etc. The editors reserve the right to, when necessary, paraphrase portions of the text in order to fit the space available.

Next Issue: August 2023. Due out approximately August 15th.
Deadline for submissions: August 1st.

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NEW JERSEY DIVISION , NMRA



**SPECIAL
SUMMER
MEET**



AUGUST 5TH, 2023

Switlik Park

Hamilton, NJ

9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Switlik Park Recreation Building

5 Fisher Place, Hamilton, NJ 08620

****Free Admission For All****

Activities:

Clinics

White Elephant Sales

AP Judging

Popular Vote Contest

Model Showcase Table

Raffle and Door Prizes

Free Table

Guest Speaker

Open Layouts

**Special Guest Speaker
John Kilbride**

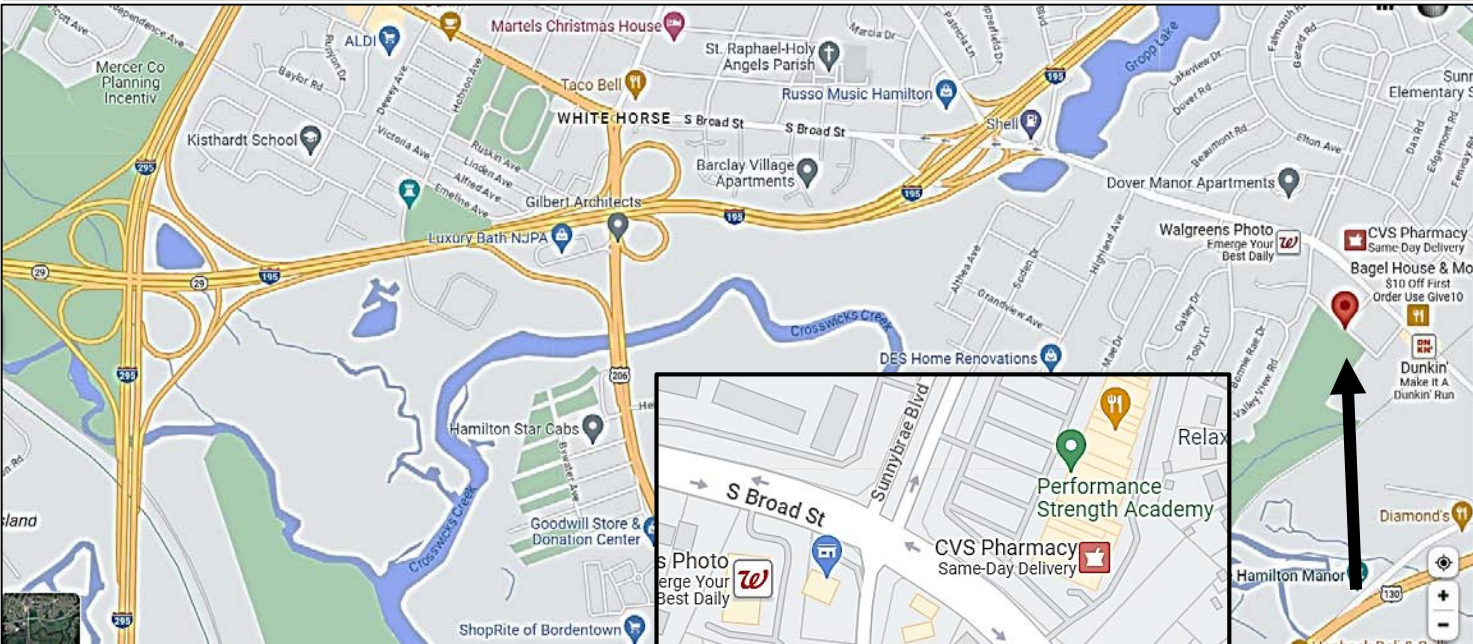
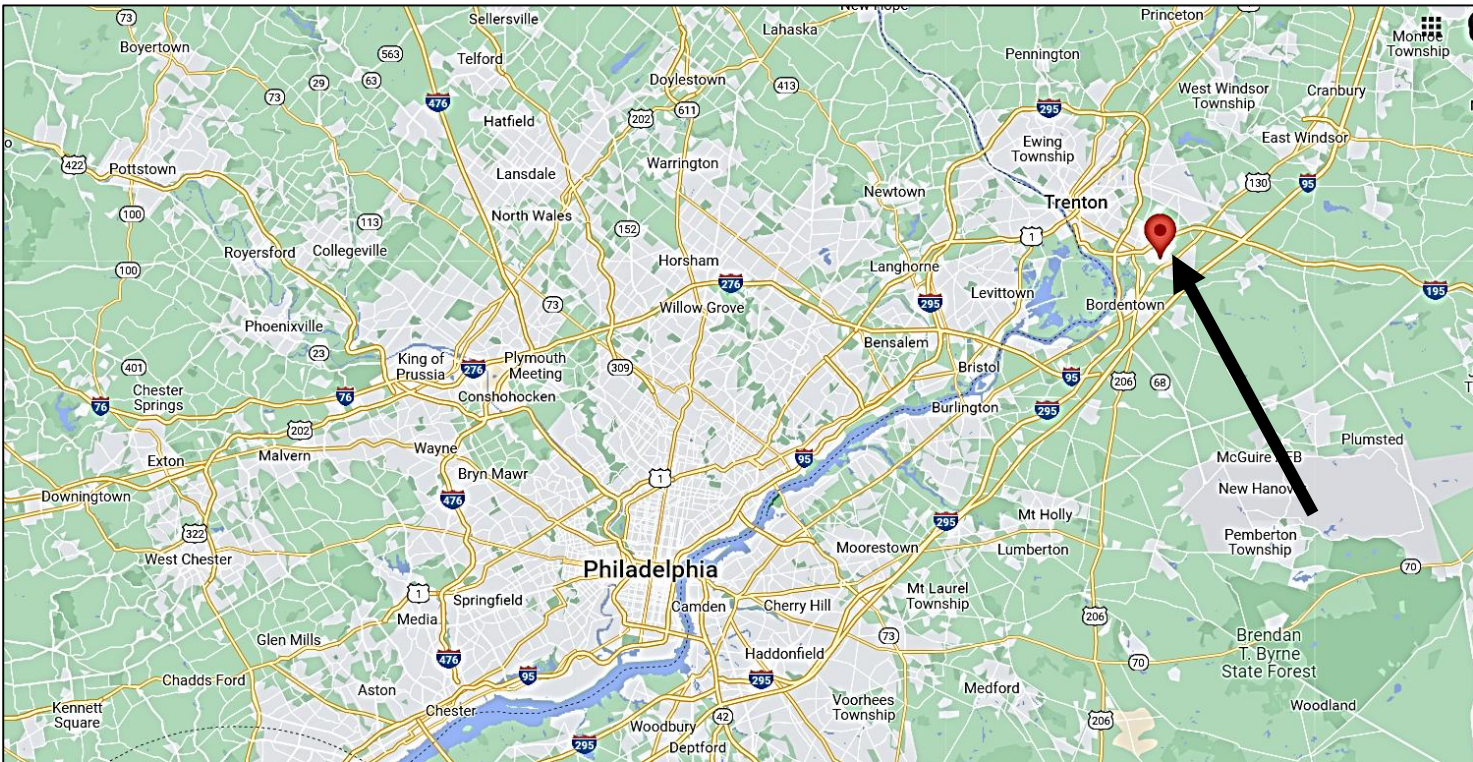
Retired Railroader, Railfan, and Historian, will do a presentation on the Camden and Amboy RR. The oldest steam railroad in NJ, which ran just a few yards behind the Switlik Park grounds.



Come join us for the first time ever summer meet of the New Jersey Division. A fun time is in store for all attendees! The venue is the Rec building in Switlik Park in Hamilton, NJ where our March meet is held. In summer, the park is a beautiful inviting green space. We'll have lots of great activities in which you can participate, a fantastic guest speaker, and, wow you're kidding me, a \$2 hoagie, chips and soda lunch! Of course other outside options are available in the area. Admission is free to all, come and enjoy!

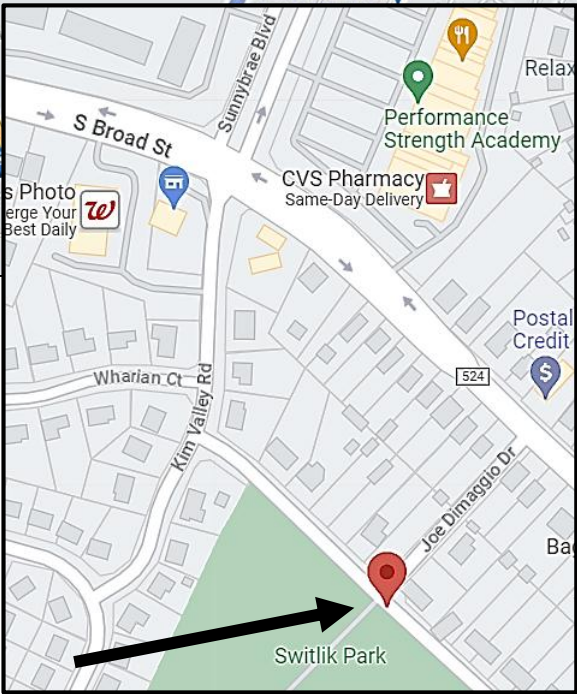
Please RSVP to Mike Prokop via email with "Special" in the subject line at njwrr@aol.com. We need to know how many will be attending for planning purposes, especially for lunch.

Maps and Directions to the August Meet



Take I-295 to I-195 east, Exit 2 – S. Broad St.-
Yardville, right onto S. Broad St., right on
Kim Valley Rd., left on Fischer Place.

Switlik Park
5 Fischer Place
Hamilton Township, NJ 08620



Division Organization

BOARD OF DIRECTORS (elected)

OFFICERS

Superintendent – Joe Walters, MMR (2024)
Assistant Superintendent – Rob Hinkle (2025)
Clerk – Charles Long (2024)
Treasurer – Kevin Feeney (2025)

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Steve Wysowski – Member Outreach (2025)
Jeff Witt – Venues (2025)



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AP Committee Chair – Joe Walters, MMR
Newsletter Editor/Webmaster – Howard Kaplan

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Venues – Jeff Witt, Kevin Feeney
Refreshments – Bill Fagan, Joe Walters, Kevin Feeney
Door Prizes – Mike Dettinger, Kevin Feeney
Clinic Video – Chip Stevens, Rob Hinkle
Certificates/Awards/Printed Materials – Earl Paine, Howard Kaplan

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Member Outreach – Steve Wysowski
Membership Records – Charles Long

ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM - Earl Paine, Joe Walters MMR, Bill Fagan, Chip Stevens, Steve Hamilton, Mark Wallace

OPS – Rob Hinkle

ITEM DONATIONS – Kevin Feeney

MEDIA

Social Media – Rob Hinkle

Webmaster – Howard Kaplan

Newsletter – Howard Kaplan, Earl Paine, Bill Fagan, Joe Walters MMR, Kevin Feeney, Chip Stevens

Layout Video – Bill Fagan

Photography – Rob Hinkle, Howard Kaplan, Bill Fagan, Rob Ischinger, Mark Wallace

DIVISION APPAREL – Howard Kaplan

Hobby Shops

Be sure to patronize the following hobby shops that are now offering discounts on model railroading purchases to NMRA members:

Henning's Trains
128 South Line Steet
Lansdale, PA 19446
215-362-2442
henningstrains.com

10% in addition to already discounted prices

Please let us know of any hobby shops that would be interested in advertising or offering discounts to NMRA members.

ANTHRACITE RAILROADS MODELERS MEET **XI**



SEPTEMBER 15-16-17, 2023



**Reading Railroad Heritage Museum
500 South 3rd Street Hamburg, PA**

Clinics – Model Displays – Vendors - White Elephant Table
Raffle prizes - Home Layout Tours

Reading Railroad Museum – Locomotive & Rolling Stock Displays

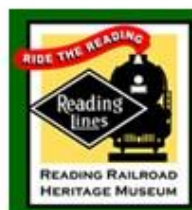
More Information and Updates Go To- www.ReadingRRMM.com

HELLO!! This event is the former *Reading Railroad Modelers Meet*, with simply a new name to promote more of the railroads that we are honoring and learning about. We are hopeful the name change will encourage more participation in the event, clinics and tours. That will make this event better for everyone! Registration form on the back of this flyer!

Interested in presenting a clinic or being a vendor?

Barry Hensel barry76Lt@wowway.com 734-649-3056

Hosted by: **The Reading Railroad Heritage Museum,
Reading Company Technical & Historical Society
and Anthracite Railroads Historical Society**



**Anthracite Railroads
Historical Society, Inc.**

**READING COMPANY
TECHNICAL & HISTORICAL SOCIETY**



**REGISTRATION FORM
ON NEXT PAGE**

ANTHRACITE RAILROADS MODELERS MEET XI OFFICIAL ENTRY FORM

Please PRINT the information below and mail with proper fees to:

ANTHRACITE RAILROADS MODELERS MEET XI
PO Box 15143 Reading, PA 19612-5143

A confirmation letter with your official entry number and final event outline, will be mailed/emailed to you in mid-September 2023. All entries MUST be postmarked by September 1, 2023. **You CAN register AT the Meet!**

NAME _____ ADDITIONAL NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ COUNTRY _____ ZIP _____

TELEPHONE (____) _____ EMAIL _____

ANTHRACITE RAILROADS MODELERS MEET XI ENTRY FEES

Please make checks and/or money orders payable in
US FUNDS to: **RCT&HS** Children under 16 are FREE
with a paid adult entry for Wall Street or Crusader entry only.

The Wall Street attending **WITH** Model Display - \$30
Early bird registration \$20 BEFORE August 15

The Crusader attending **WITHOUT** Model Display - \$40
Early bird registration \$30 BEFORE August 15

The King Coal Saturday Dinner \$15/person....
choice of hoagie (2 or 3 types), chips, drink, cookie
is available PRE-ORDER ONLY by September 1, 2023

Reading Terminal Service attending **ONLINE** - \$15

The BeeLine Service vendor table \$15 each (8' table limit 2)

Anthracite Railroads Modelers Meet XI Event T-Shirt
is available PRE-ORDER ONLY by September 1, 2023

	QTY	PRICE	TOTAL
WALL STREET		\$20/30	
CRUSADER		\$30/40	
KING COAL		\$15	
BEE LINE SERVICE		\$15	
RDG TERM SERV		\$15	
Event T-shirt			
small		\$22	
medium		\$22	
large		\$22	
X Large		\$22	
XX Large		\$25	
XXX Large		\$25	
GRAND TOTAL			

EVENT SPONSORS



















ON THE (RAIL) ROAD WITH KEVIN FEENEY

CONVENTIONS – SHOWS – TRAVEL

Editor's Note: Due to time constraints this issue's column has not been edited. There are no page footers and any page numbers you see are those included by Kevin. So sit back and enjoy his adventures—raw and uncut!

Trip to the Mid-East - March 8 -16 2023



Being value travelers, our trips are sometimes chosen based on available airfares rather than by the specific destination. Back in January, there was promotional offer in my American Airlines [AA] account for spring flights on QATAR Airways [QR], which is part of the *One World Alliance* with AA and a dozen other carriers. We have flown on QATAR twice before, once to Abu Dhabi [2015] and the other time to Jakarta Indonesia, both times via Doha [DOH -their hub]. The offer was for discounted fares to a number of destinations so we looked at where we could fly to. Carol liked the Seychelles and Maldives Islands in the middle of Indian Ocean,. However, the connecting flights were awkward plus both destinations were relatively expensive and offered little more than beaches and expensive hotels. I passed on several places in Eastern Africa and we settled on Kuwait [via Doha], which offered beaches on the Persian Gulf and Kuwait City [KWI].

The red line on the map above shows the geodesic path, which is the shortest distance between from PHL to DOH. In this case, it is 6797 miles and then 352 miles from DOH backtracking to KWI. Using the FLIGHTAWARE app, I monitored the performance of our intended flight [QR728] for several days before we left and saw that it was taking a longer, more southerly route across the Atlantic to the Iberian Peninsula then crossing the MED, doing a jog around the bottom of Israel and finally making a diagonal dash across Saudi Arabia. I was surprised by the flight over Saudi Arabia because I thought there was still a dispute between QATAR and the Saudis. The last time we flew QR, we followed the path above. Amazingly, for the week before we traveled, the long flight averaged 12 hrs. +/-15 minutes and consistently arrived ahead of schedule. I'll talk about the actual distance later in this write-up.

Why Kuwait? No particular reason, except it was a new country for both of us and perhaps my 66th? When we lived in CT, I had ready access to a map that showed all of the countries I have been to. It got packed up back in January 2019 and has not been seen since. It is probably in the files on the shelves in one of our 3rd floor bedrooms. Kuwait is a very small country with a total land mass of only 6,880 sq miles, most of which is desert. For comparison, it is a bit bigger than

the Hawaii, which is our 4th smallest state. From a list of world countries by size, I saw Kuwait is the 43rd smallest with most of smaller ones being island nations or tiny European countries like Vatican City, Monaco, Liechtenstein, RSM, Luxembourg and Andorra. Its borders were set by a 1922 treaty with Saudi Arabia to the south and Iraq to the west and north. However, its southern border was originally set as a neutral zone in deference to the nomadic Bedouin tribes that then lived in the area. Its southern border was not officially defined until 1970. To the northeast, Kuwait shares a short maritime border with Iran.

There are no trains in Kuwait, although back in the 1930s the Iraqis offered to build a rail line to Kuwait from Baghdad if Kuwait would have allowed Iraq to build a port on the Persian Gulf. Iraq is almost landlocked with only a very short coastline where the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers reach the Persian Gulf. No doubt the geography played into Saddam Hussein's decision to invade Kuwait on August 2, 1990. There has long been talk of a rail transit system in Kuwait. Back in 2020, the Kuwait Government announced the start of a 160 km. METRO system. Kuwait will be part of **Gulf Cooperation Council's** proposed 2000+ km., \$25 billion rail project, which will eventually begin in Kuwait and runs to Muscat Oman via Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE.

It has a population of 3.45 million but only 1.45 million are native Kuwaiti. While officially a Muslim country, its constitution guarantees religious freedom. Still Kuwait is more conservative than the other Gulf countries as alcohol is totally banned plus Carol and I needed a marriage certificate to be able to sleep in the same room. We saw some Kuwaiti women wearing an all-black niqab garb with just a tiny slit by the eyes. Others wore black but you could see their face. Still others just wore a modest head covering. The Kuwaiti men wore a long flowing, usually white, garb called a thawb with a kaffiyeh head piece that often looked like a red/white tablecloth. The other 2.0 million are guest workers from Asia/Africa plus some true ex-pats.

Certificate of Marriage

The Catholic Newman Community
At the University of Rochester

~ Certifies ~

That Kevin Charles Feeney and Carol Ann Buttenschon
Were lawfully Married

On the 20th day of December, 1975

According to the Rite of the Roman Catholic Church
and in conformity of the laws of
the State of New York

Rev. James Lawlor officiating,
In the presence of John Storz and Deborah Kaelin

As appears from the Marriage Register of this Church
Dated December 20, 1975

Rev. Brian Cool, Pastor

NEWMAN

Trinity Chapel, 1045 Joseph C. Wilson Blvd., Rochester, NY 14627
tel: +1 (585) 275-8516 • Fax: +1 (585) 276-0703 • catholicnewmancommunity@rochester.edu • www.artsnewman.org

Its money, the Kuwait Dinar [KD or sometimes KWD], is said to be the highest value currency in the world. It was worth about \$3.26 when we were there although its value was a bit higher on March 10th when SVB failed. There are paper bills for 1,5,10,20, etc. KD but also for ½ and ¼ KD. The KD is subdivided into 1000 Fils. Because of this, retail prices were usually expressed to 3 decimal points and since the only coins we saw were 100 & 200 Fils, a bit of rounding took place on some cash purchases. All this said, except for cab fares, bus fares and tips, virtually all of our expenses there were on a credit card.



WEDNESDAY March 8th

Not wanting to leave our car at the train station for over a week, we walked to the corner and took SEPTA's #55 bus north up PA RT 611 at 406PM for a short distance so we could board an airport train at 439PM at the tiny Crestmont station. Like on a previous train ride, another SEPTA employee knocked on the engineer's compartment and had an unsafe, continuous conversation during the ride into Center city. I reported them to SEPTA. After the normal stops,

we were at PHL by 550PM in plenty of time for QR flight # 728 at 2125. We checked two bags in A West, keeping a small carry-on bag with a change of clothes plus our two knapsacks. Because the AA lounge in A is still closed for remodeling, we had to walk over to the lounge between the B & C concourses. We were there for about two hours. We had some of the meatballs being served that day. Near where we were sitting was a group of travelers wearing the same red shirt. I asked one of them how much did you pay for the shirt? Free- yea right – it was included in the price of their tour. The group was from Kansas and I asked where they were going? Ireland! I gave them a few travel tips and kept them amused with some of my travel tales for a while. Before they left the lounge for their flight to DUB, one of them gave me his email, which has been added to my distribution list for my trip reports.



We left the lounge about 820PM for the long walk to gate A16. When there, we saw lots of folks waiting to board. The boarding was somewhat confusing as our boarding pass said we were in group 4 but the gate agent announced those with *One World Emerald* status [like me] could board with the business class folks. The entire front of the A350-1000 was full with 46 pod seats [QR calls then Qsuites] some of which were facing rear-facing. Regrettably, there was NO premium economy section, just 281 regular economy seats in a XXX-XXX-XXX layout. We had window and aisle seats in row 19 on the right side. When we checked in earlier that day, the middle seat was empty, but now for the flight we had a Egyptian/American woman from South Jersey flying to Cairo sitting between us on what seemed to be a very full flight. The row and seats were both tight, and we would be in them for the next 12.5 hours!



We left just about on time at 925PM. From the way we were taxiing, I could tell we would be taking off to the southwest. I turned on the flight map and followed our route. After takeoff, we made a sweeping turn to the left over South Jersey, and then made a diagonal across the Garden State to a point near Asbury Park. Over the Atlantic Ocean for a bit, we then passed directly over Montauk Point at the end of Long Island and next passed over Cape Cod before being over

water again. Dinner was served about an hour after takeoff. Before we took off, the senior flight attendant introduced herself to me, welcoming me for being *Emerald*, and ask my choice of meal. I ordered the chicken, which was ok. However, I certainly have had better airline food. Before, during and after the meal, I binge watched the parts of the second and fifth seasons of *Young Sheldon*.

By 1230AM, I was ready for sleep. Meanwhile, the plane flew across the Atlantic till it entered



French airspace. This track was different from the path of similar flights from days before, all of which flew over the Iberian Peninsula. After France, the plane flew over Italy then the Balkans before crossing the Med to enter Egyptian airspace over the Sinai. This was done to avoid overflying Israel. It was somewhere there that I woke up. We were served another meal, more chicken and worse than the first. We passed over the Gulf of Aqaba [no “u” after the q] and entered Saudi Arabian airspace for the last 2.5 hrs. of the flight. Eventually, we flew over the Persian Gulf and landed at the yuge **Doha Hamad Int’l Airport**. This is Qatar

Airways’ hub from which it flies to about 150 cities all over the world.

THURSDAY March 9th

After the overnight flight of 12’ 26” for 7167 miles, we arrived in DOH at 557pm [1757 per the 24-hour clock used for time here and in most of the world, except for the US] just as it was getting dark there. We came into a C gate and were not allowed to leave the plane until the business class cabin had emptied. However, then we were directed to exit thru that cabin to use the front door just behind the cockpit. While walking thru that cabin, I scarfed up two unused business class amenity kits that I will sell on eBay to a collector of airline memorabilia. We also kept the two smaller kits given out in economy class. Once in the terminal, we followed the TRANSFER signs, eventually ended up in the center of the airport proper.



It is really hard to describe the DOH airport as there is nothing like it in the US. It opened in 2014 replacing the DIA airport that is located a few kilometers to the west. Carol and I passed thru DOH in 2015 on our spring break trip to the UAE and Oman. The airport's footprint is 22 square kilometers [8.5 sq miles] with about half of that area reclaimed from the adjacent Persian Gulf. The passenger terminal building with over 600,000 sq meters is Qatar's biggest building. The check-in hall alone has over 25,000 sq meters of airy, column-free space. There is a ½ kilometer long, linear cable car that runs between the C&D concourses. We saw it being tested with bags of sand back in 2015. It has scores of stores, restaurants, lounges, prayer rooms, an hourly hotel, etc., that all are open 24/7. It was rated the #1 airport in the world for 2021 and 2022 by **Sky Trax**. It fell to #2 in the 2023 ranking, with Singapore's Changi Airport now rated as #1.

Our connecting flight [QR1082] to KWI was scheduled to depart at 2030 from gate A11. From a service counter in the pictures above, we were directed to a lounge near gate A1. There Carol was able to have her Diet Cokes [she actually wanted to stop and buy one as we were walking there] and I was able to shower and change my clothes plus have some food. Later, as I was putting my toiletries back into the carry-on bag that I brought for my first RTW trip back in 2004, I put my fingers into one of small pockets and found this passport picture of Carol. On the back it says "01/06/2005". Admittedly, I have not used this particular bag in a long time. Eventually, we left the lounge and walked to our gate, which was at the very end of the A concourse. I had wondered why the flight was scheduled with a Boeing 787-9 as these planes are typically used on long-haul flights and KWI was only 352 miles away. Well, there was a very large crowd waiting that seemingly filled all of the Dreamliner's 311 seats.



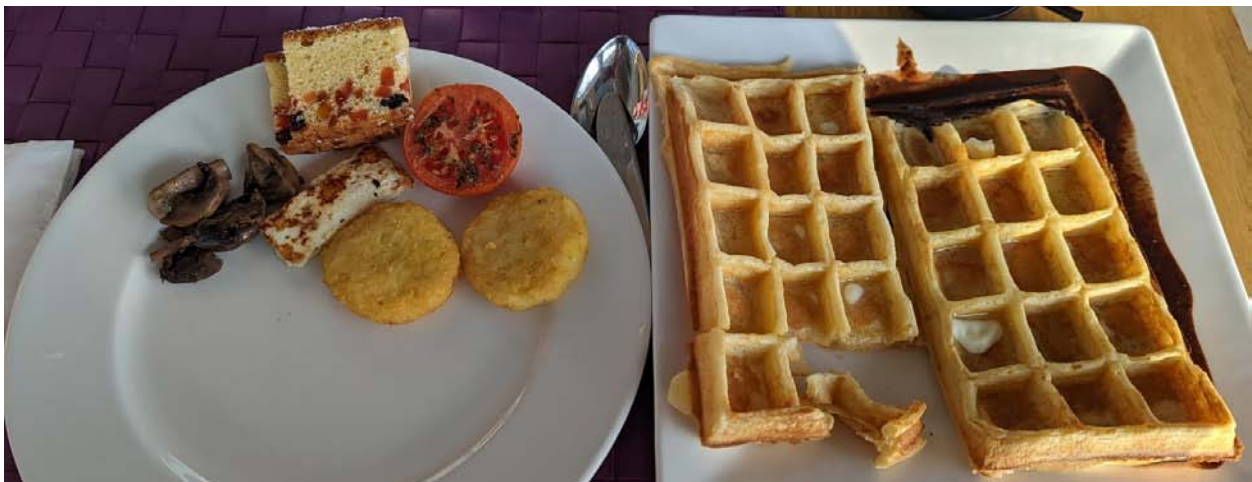
Carol and I had our normal window/aisle seats and the row pitch was wider than that on the A350-1000. A thin, mid-eastern man sat between us and did not have much to say but did take a selfie with me. We took off at 2037 and basically flew north over the Persian Gulf. Enroute, they served a snack wrap with a bottle of OJ. We arrived at KWI at 2158 and could immediately see the airport was older and certainly not like the one in DOH. We followed the signs to immigration where we learned we needed a visa. Somehow, I missed that. We were directed to go back upstairs to the VISA Office where one was easily issued upon arrival at no charge. Back downstairs, we were then able to skip the immigration line and head right to baggage claim. It took a while for our bags to come out. We walked under the Green customs sign and were in the arrival area. We had arranged for a hotel pickup at the KWI and were surprised to be met by not only a driver, but also someone from the hotel's concierge desk. We rode in a Chevy Suburban. GM vehicles are quite popular there as supposedly they have the best A/C. The temps were in the 60s and 70s when we were there. However, the summers can get quite **hot**. On 21 July 2016, Mitrabah Kuwait set a new record highest temperature, for the Eastern hemisphere and Asia, of 54.0°C (129.2°F). We were at the hotel by 2320, checked in and headed to our room and called it a night.



Our hotel for the next six nights was a **Hilton Resort** located in Mangaf on the Persian Gulf about 40 kms. south of Kuwait City. It is probably the biggest hotel of its type in Kuwait and it includes the large meeting/ballroom facility to the left. We looked at the IHG [Holiday Inn] properties there but they were business hotels in Kuwait City with no beaches, etc. Our room is indicated by the red dot. We had been upgraded to a deluxe, water-view room that was quite large. The chalets/villas that tail off to the right are family accommodations that sleep up to 8 people.

FRIDAY March 10th

We slept till after 9AM and then got dressed and headed to the included breakfast. This was in the **Teatro Restaurant** and turned out to be a yuge buffet that was available each day from 0500-1100. There was an enormous amount of food offered from eggs/waffles made to order, salads, meats, cheese, fruits, baked goods and a whole line of local hot dishes. Being a creature of habit, my breakfast consisted of basically the same things each day and usually second



helpings such that I did not eat lunch for the whole week. I tried and did not like the beef bacon and the chicken sausages did not look appealing. Carol bought the breakfast shakes from her

new KETO diet program with her and the only thing she needed there was some ice. However, as we were leaving the restaurant, she charged two cans of Diet Coke to the room that cost 3 KD [\$9.78]. There was a bank ATM on the property and I withdrew 50KD [\$163] so we would have some cash but, in reality, we only needed a small part of it.

Unfortunately, it was raining a bit that day so no swimming. Turns out March is their rainy season. So, we explored the hotel grounds. There were two stores and a café inside the hotel. Downstairs was a spa and a yuge fitness center. Carol made an appointment for a massage the following day and also used their indoor hydro pool later in our visit. After the rain stopped, we walked on the beach and around the building. Outside of the hotel, but before the villas, there were a Starbucks and a pizza place. We walked in there and saw their menu that included other Italian dishes. We rested until it was time for dinner when we walked back to Teatro Restaurant for its *Spices of Asia* buffet. Some of the food was like that at breakfast, but there was a variety of meats/seafood that were cooked to order, plus two lines of hot dishes. All of this was very good. My only complaint is that the bread and rolls were mediocre and I am a big bread eater. I don't know what the normal cost for this is as we used a 25% off coupon such our dinner cost 33KD [\$108].

SATURDAY March 11th

The restaurant was really crowded that morning. Next to our table were two tables of similar looking Asian woman wearing moderate head covering. As we were leaving, I asked one of them where they were from? - the Philippines, no doubt the Moro region. We spoke with them for a while. They all lived and worked in Kuwait and were enjoying a weekend breakfast among friends. After breakfast, we headed to the pool, which was a bit warm but not hot. After swimming a while, I laid on one of the lounges and fell asleep. Meanwhile, Carol went down and tried the beach but it was too cold. Back in the room and Carol drank the bottle of OJ that we got on the flight from DOH. She then scanned the QR code on the bottle that took her to <https://baladna.com> from which she learned this Qatari company operates a yuge dairy farm with



about 24,000 cows and locally produces over 200 dairy and juice products including the needed packaging. For dinner, we went to the pizza place and split a decent pie that was strangely sized in inches. With two sodas it cost \$35.90. I gave our server, a young man from India, several of the older RR mags that I had finished reading.

SUNDAY March 12th

This was another day with light rain. We had a late breakfast and then just sat around till 1400 when we took the hotel shuttle to the **Al Kou Mall** that was several kms. to the south. We were dropped off by the older part of the mall that was on an enclosed harbor. We saw fishing boats being loaded with ice. Walking inside, we came into a fruit/vegetable market where all the



produce looked and was packaged the same. Next to it was a food market and we stocked up on Diet Cokes that only cost KD 0.090 [29¢] a can. I also brought a small box of Lipton English Breakfast tea for \$2.07. We crossed the street and walked into the upscale, western-style mall. This included a Hyatt hotel and scores of restaurants. It seems Carol is always shoe shopping, and she brought a nice pair of sandals made in Turkey for 29 KD [\$95]. Eventually, we had a cheap dinner in the food court from two local companies -**Chicster** and **WokDojo**. We walked to the main entrance and caught a taxi for 3 KD (\$9.78) to the **Our Lady of Arabia Catholic Church** in Ahmadi.

Driving there, we passed by an oil refinery and other oil field infrastructure. Turns out Ahmadi is where the headquarters of the Kuwait Oil Company [KOC] is located. In fact, the original catholic church was built there in 1948 inside a Nissen [Quonset] hut on land donated by KOC. The present church was built in the 1956 and was damaged in 1990-1991 when Iraq invaded Kuwait. In the mid-east, the mass schedule largely follows the Friday/Saturday Muslim weekend, but some masses are also offered on Sunday. This catholic church [one of three in



Kuwait] is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year and offers mass in seven languages and several rites. We arrived early for the 6PM mass when a Syro-Malabar service was in process; this is an autonomous Eastern Rite Catholic Church based in India. There were only a few western folks at our mass. After the mass, I wondered how we would get back to our hotel but there were taxis waiting outside. Passing thru Ahmadi, the city was lit up with colorful Christmas? style lights. The taxi driver did not speak much English so I did not know what this would cost [there were no meters in the taxis]. Back at the hotel, I gave him 5 KD [\$16.30] and he seemed happy.

MONDAY March 13th

it was a bit rainy again. We slept really late and I had to shower and dress quickly. It was 1035 when I got the restaurant alone, which was almost empty. I had the same food again and took several pieces of the English [fruit] cake with me when I left. Our plan for today was to take the bus to Kuwait City. I had researched this online and saw several bus routes ran by the hotel. I stopped to confirm this at the concierge desk and was surprised that the man there did not even know the cost of the bus. He recommended taking a taxi for about 30 KDs [\$98]. Out on the adjacent road, we had to walk a bit to the bus stop but a Route 102A bus came quickly. We boarded and paid our fare of 350 Fils [\$1.14] each and settled in for what was almost an 1.5 hr. ride. The route ended at a bus station, which was what I wanted because we would know where to get the bus back. I had printed out two maps of downtown Kuwait City and it quickly became apparent that we were *nowhere* near where we wanted to be. We started walking towards what seemed to be the shoreline and in doing so, a doorman from a Sheraton hotel there spoke to us and pointed us in a different direction.

We first came to the **Holy Family Catholic Cathedral** that was all locked up. A short distance



ahead we came to a small park on the shoreline. Across the street in the other direction was a large building that was identified on the map as the **Sheikh Jaber Al-Almed Cultural Center**. We headed there not knowing what to expect. We had to walk around outside wall to enter thru a parking garage. There was a car just like my Mercury Marquis and the garage floor was clean enough to eat on.



Once inside the actual building, there was a moving walkway that passed this art.



Eventually we got to the lobby and found that the Center was actually an Opera House that also hosted concerts and other musical performances. There was a small exhibit of photographs of Kuwait City back in the 1930s, that looked nothing like it looks today. We found our way to the middle of the Center where there were gardens and several restaurants. Carol needed something to drink so we stopped for that at the **Cocoa Room** and had a nice piece of cake [above] for 7.950 KD [\$25.92].

We headed back to the bus station where I realized there were more than one bus company



operating on the same route numbers. At 1430, we boarded this bus operating on Route 999 and paid our 250 Fils fare [82¢] each.

The traffic was unbelievable. It often took 10 minutes to cross a major intersection and we had to go thru several of them. We

pulled into KPTC's main bus station so the driver could refuel. On the way back, we passed the

Liberation Tower, a 372-meter-high [1,220'] tall telecommunications tower that is the second-tallest structure in the country. It was under construction in 1990 when Iraq invaded and when finished in 1993, it was given this name. The 999 Route bus went back a slightly different way but ended up driving alongside the Persian Gulf like we did on the trip in. We finally exited by hotel but by then it was 1650 meaning the ride took 2' 20".

For dinner, we went back to Teatro for *Ladies' night*. An offer on the tables said her "food" would be 50% off. Instead of doing another buffet, we ordered a la carte. I had grilled shrimps and she had four lamb chops. The food was VG but when I got the bill there was no discount. I asked the server who said the discount only applied to the buffet. I stopped a manager who was walking by and pointed out the offer on the table said "food", not specifying the buffet. He got us an adjusted bill. My shrimps cost \$36 while her lamb chops came to \$18. We got free sodas that night using other coupons.

TUESDAY March 14th

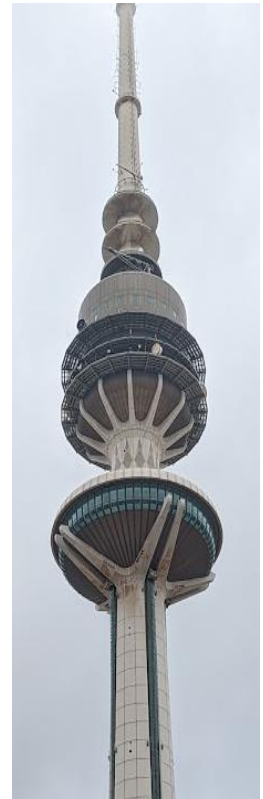
After breakfast, I headed to the outdoor pool while Carol went to the inside hydra pool. Later, we watched some TV together. For dinner, we went back to the pizza place. Since this was *national pi day* [3.14], we probably should have had another pizza but instead ordered two entrees. Carol had the shrimp dish, while I had chicken in a casserole dish covered with pizza dough. The bill came to like 11KD [\$36] that I paid in cash. We had been tipping 10% and here we left our remaining coins and the fractional bills as the tip.



I tried several times that day but was unsuccessful at checking in online for our return flights.

WEDNESDAY March 15th

We were up early and headed to our last breakfast by 0715. The restaurant was almost empty. On the way back to our room, I checked out paying 10 KD with my remaining cash and put the rest on my Hilton AMEX card. Once in the room, I told Carol to go to the front desk and get a copy of our bill while I tried one last time to check-in on-line for our return flights. No luck, so I headed to the front desk. We left the hotel just after 0800 and were in KWI about 20 minutes later. Much of the ride was on a highway. As we neared the airport, I could see a massive new terminal is being constructed and part of it may open later this year. The existing airport was



built back in 1979 and was the site of a major tank battle on Feb. 27, 1991 during the liberation of Kuwait. The airport was remodeled from 1999-2001 and is showing its age. Just west of the civilian airport is an air force base that is also used by the US and other allies plus a major air cargo facility. We checked in with no problems and were directed to a generic airport lounge that was decent to await our QATAR flight [QR1085] at 1125. Walking to our gate, we passed thru the area with the duty free stores. Given there is no liquor for sale there, I guess they need other things to sell. Still, I have never seen Tang for sale like this before.



Our plane was a A320, which is the smallest type in QATAR Airways' fleet. It carried 12 passengers in business class and 132 folks in the back of the[air] bus. It seemed to be full. The middle seat between us was occupied by a farmer in Kuwait who was connecting in DOH for his flight home to Pakistan on vacation. It was a short flight and almost entirely over the Persian Gulf. We left early and arrived in DOH at 1234 coming into the same gate, A11, from where we flew in the opposite direction a few days before. We had to walk thru the terminal till we got to the immigration counters. There we were granted a transit visa for our short, overnight stay and headed to the Metro. Along the way, I exchanged 50 UAE Dirhams, left over from a trip to Dubai in 2015, for 49 Qatari Riyals [QR]. I had seen an online video that made it seem quite EZ to get to the Metro from the airport terminal. Instead, we walked and walked thru two parking garages using moving walkways, escalators and finally an elevator to finally get down to track level.

This is a really new transit system that first opened in 2019 as part of the infrastructure improvements for the **2022 FIFA World Cup** held in QATAR last November and December. The system has three color-coded lines [RED YELLOW GREEN] with a total of 76 kms. of track. It is said to be the world's longest and fastest *driverless* system. We brought *Standard*



fare day passes for 6 QRs [\$1.65] each. There were METRO personnel to help at the TVMs and on the platforms. The trains were three-car articulated sets with two class of service, built by Kinki Sharyo in Osaka Japan. Half of one car was the higher-level, GOLD class while the other half was Standard class but only for families or women traveling alone. The remaining two cars were Standard class for males only.

Leaving the airport station, I headed to the end of the front car and could clearly see the line was made by a tunnel boring machine. We existed in four stops at Al Doha Al Jadedda and walked



about 450 meters to a **Holiday Inn Hotel**. This was next to a Crown Plaza where we stayed on our last visit there. We had a standard room on the fifth floor. Carol used my welcome amenity to get a free drink [Jameson's] at the bar in the second-floor restaurant. Eventually, we headed back to the Metro and rode maybe 30 kms. to the end of the RED line in Lusail. This will be the site of a major new city and was the location of the major stadium that was built for the World Cup. The other things to see there were some distance from the Metro Station. We could see the station for the Lusail Tram but did not walk to it. Instead, we just headed back on the Red Line.



This was the view from the train just before the line returned underground where we connected to the Green line and rode that for about 20 kms. to its final stop at the Mall of Qatar.



This was a massive, high-end mall. Most of the signage was in English and this was the first time I ever saw shopping carts in a mall. There also was a kiddy train that rode thru the mall.



We really didn't go there to shop. Instead, it was just to see the place and have dinner. The food court was massive with about every US fast food operator and there were sit-down restaurants on two levels. We ate at the **Manhattan Fish Company** with sit down service. I had a mixed plate of chicken, scallops and fish while Carol had fried fish. The meals with two sodas cost \$27.47.



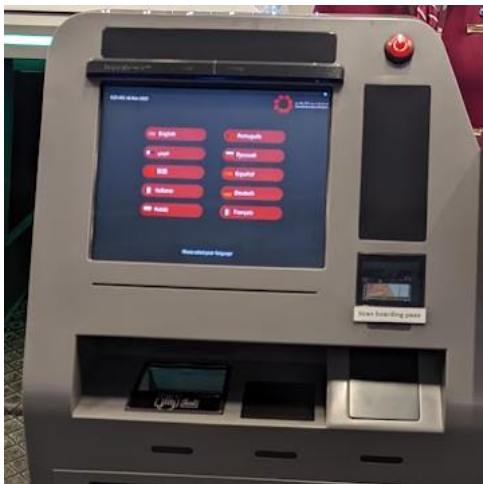
As we were finishing our meal, some type of spectacular show began in the center of the mall to our right. We walked over and watched it in person for a while, but one could also watch it from the mall's upper level on the massive jumbotron.



Outside of the mall were some interesting light displays. We headed back to the Metro; we rode back on the Green Line and then the Red Line to the station near our hotel. I found a store that was open and bought a Diet Coke for Carol that cost 12QR [\$3.30]. We packed up what few things we had with us and called it an early night.

THURSDAY March 16

We were up at 0415 and down at the front desk just before 0500 to check out. I paid 30QR from my remaining cash and put the rest on my IHG credit card. We needed to get back to the airport for our 0755 flight, but the Metro did not start running until after 6AM. The hotel called a cab that arrived a few minutes later. The driver was from Tanzania. As we approached DOH, I



could see how massive the facility really was. Once there, I tried to pay the 28KD fare but his device would not accept my card. Tried another card and nada. Finally, I asked Carol if she had any US bills and asked to driver to find out how much 30KD was in USD - \$7.80. I gave him \$10 and we were set. I tried to check in at the business counter but was told I needed to go to economy. I looked for a special line for *Emerald* status and seeing none just walked up to one of staff who checked us in. However, the counter we were at actually had an automated check-in machine that I have never seen before. It took us only a few minutes to go thru immigration and then security. We headed back to the same lounge we used there on March 9th. I was able to

get some food while Carol drank one of her breakfast shakes and had three small cans of Diet Coke. We stayed there until 0625 and then it took about 15 minutes to walk to Gate C 10 for our flight [QR727] to PHL that boarded at 0655. While we walked there, I could see the cable cars



passing overhead. To get to the actual boarding gate, we needed to go thru security again. However, there is no requirement to take off your shoes there.

We were able to board along with the folks flying in business class. The plane was an A 350-900 that was smaller than the plane on the flight over. This one sat 36 in business class [1-2-1] and 247 in coach [XXX-XXX-XXX]. We were quickly in our normal seats [window and aisle] on the right side and then a short, somewhat plump Asian woman stood by our row. Carol got

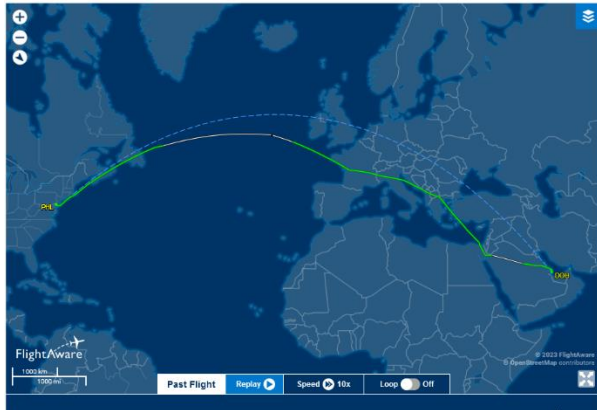


up to let her in and the woman pointed to Carol's seat. Carol told her that was NOT going to happen. She squeezed herself into our narrow row, more than filling the middle seat. Unfortunately, I had put up my left armrest so her sari was touching me. [Later when she went to the bathroom, I put the armrest down and then she wedged in between that and Carol's right arm rest.] Again, all the seats on the plane seemed to be full.

We left the gate at 0756, taxied a bit and then took off to the north. I followed the route map on my display screen for a while and then switched to watch more of *Young Sheldon*. I watched another 17 episodes of Season 5. I really like the show but can't watch it at home because we do not have cable or broadcast TV. I refuse to pay for content so we just watch rerun TV for free on a streaming device. There were two meal services and again the food was mediocre. In

between, we were served a wrap snack that was I thought ok; Carol said it was awful. I certainly slept for a few hours and woke up when we are approaching Newfoundland Canada. I watched a surreal workplace comedy movie called *All Sorts* that is worth streaming. When still an hour

out, we were at 40,000' with a ground speed of 565 MPH. The flight attendants handed out the CBE entry forms. The woman between us took out her Pakistani passport and an US green card and, while pointing at the form, mumbled something to me. I asked if she needed a pen. NO. Turns out she could not speak or write in English. I asked Carol to help her, but the form needed her place of residence in US. We asked her and she said Pennsylvania. I asked where? She mumbled something that sounded like Bloomsburg? I repeated Bloomsburg? and she nodded. I made wild guess and said Bloomsburg Univ.? and she nodded again. Turns out her daughter is a professor there. We certainly did our good deed for the day even after being stuffed into our seats by this woman during a 14+ hr. flight.



This map from FLIGHTAWARE shows the route of the flight. We flew home on a more northerly route and closer to the geodetic path. The actual miles flown were 7136 miles. We came to the Jersey Shore just north of Atlantic City and then flew to somewhere near Vineland NJ then made an arcing turn to the right and then, over Cherry Hill where I used to live, turned left for the approach to PHL. We landed just after 3PM, which was almost an hour early. Getting thru CBE was a breeze. Most of the folks on the flight were not American, so the

lines for the US only kiosks were almost empty. We answered the Qs online, had our pictures taken, and made a brief stop with an agent. Then we waited about 35 minutes to get all three bags. The small carry-on that we checked in DOH ended up on the wrong belt with the bags from passengers making connecting flights.

We were able to catch the 410PM train from PHL. On again, I witnessed the engineer talking with someone instead of safely operating the train. This time a woman boarded at Penn Medicine, sat in the 2nd row and knocked on the engineer's door. Once the door was open, they talked until Suburban. I figured they must know each other because they kissed there before she left the train. I reported them to SEPTA. We had to change trains at Jefferson. We got on a West Trenton train that was running a few minutes late and were at the Noble stop in Abington by 520PM. We walked over to the bus stop on PA 611 caught a north-bound #55 bus a few minutes later. Then by at 540PM, we were in our house and this trip was history.

This was certainly a different trip for us. Folks in the Hilton hotel were quite surprised that we came to Kuwait all the way from the US. We saw very few folks from the EU and even fewer from the US. The hotel staff was extremely friendly. I would ask each one where they were from: Nepal, Bhutan, Egypt, Philippines, India and Sri Lanka. One young woman from Sri Lanka was particularly nice. Turns out she was studying hotel administration in her home country and was working at the resort for two years as part of the program. She wore a badge



saying she is a certified “waitographer”. Maybe someday we will visit her as Sri Lanka is on one of our bucket lists.

Two days later after being back, I was getting my haircut and the two barbers always like to hear about my trips. One of them asked “would I go back?” I said no, not because anything was bad, just because being there once was enough and there are still more places to see for the first time. I have yet to travel to South America and my only trip was to Africa was to briefly cross the Moroccan border from Ceuta, a Spanish autonomous city on the north coast of Africa across from Gibraltar. Carol has always wanted to see St. Petersburg Ruzia, but now that will certainly never happened.

Recapping the miles, points, etc.

Since QATAR Airways is part of the *One World Alliance*, we were able to earn loyalty points and award miles on AA. The actual airfare per person was \$885 + \$217 of passenger service charges plus various other taxes and fees. Naturally, we bought the tickets with our AA credit card earning a total of 2204 loyalty points/award miles. For credit from the actual flights, things were more complicated. When we fly on AA, we earn points/miles based on a multiple of the real net airfare. However, since we booked directly thru QATAR, AA does not have access to the fare info. (It does for code-share flights booked on *One World* carriers thru AA). So, for this trip, the points/miles would be a % of the distance flown. It was disappointing to learn that since we bought heavily discounted airfares, the points/miles would only be 25% of the distance. And the distance is that from the geodesic path not the actual miles flown! So, for PHL - DOH, 25% of 6797 was 1700 but I got another 2040 as my status bonus. For DOH -KWI, it was 352 miles $\times 25\% = 88$ plus 106 as my status bonus. So, I got 3934 points/miles each way for a total of 7868 for the roundtrip. Unfortunately, for *Million Miler* status only the base counted so I only got credit for 3576 miles round trip! This means I missed out on credit for 10,722 miles! Still after this trip, I am at 967,035 meaning I will almost certainly hit the million mark later this year. Carol earned the same base and Million Miler miles but gets a smaller bonus as she has a lower status with AA.

For the Hilton hotel stay, it was also a bit complicated. I only had about 135K points in my Hilton account, which were far short of that needed to cover the whole stay. However, I was

able to use 134,000 points to buy down the room rate from about 70 KD. For the six nights, our room that included the yuge buffet breakfast each AM cost \$1018 w/ taxes. Oddly the room rate was different each night and ranged from 38 KD to 50 KD. The stay earned me 37,687 Hilton points thanks to two bonuses and a special promo. I paid the bill with my Hilton AMEX card and for the converted \$1254 total bill I will earn another 8781 points. Lucky for me, the charge just missed the March 15th closing date on my AMEX. This means it will not bill until April 15th and I will not have to pay it until around May 9th.

The one night at the HI in Doha earned 1403 points plus I will get about 800 more by using the Chase IHG credit card to pay the bill. More importantly, the stay will enable me to take advantage of two special promotions, one of which will extend my 2022 elite status with IHG thru Dec. 23. 2023

There will be two more trips this month.

For March 24-27, I will be flying to Rochester NY to attend a model train event.

On March 29th, Carol & I will fly to Denver via CLT.

We'll visit the CO & WY capitol buildings, ride the cog railway up Pikes Peak and then I will attend the **Rocky Mountain Train** show on April 1st. This is the largest train show between the Midwest and West Coast.

ISRAEL April 30th - May 11th



This was our 2nd trip to the Mid-East this year. The origins of this trip began a long time ago – back in the fall of 1970 when I went to the University of Rochester. I had a 3rd floor dorm room in Gilbert Hall and eventually became friends with the girl [Debbie Rotenstein] who was living in the dorm room directly below my room. After a while, I asked her out on a date. She said no. I said I usually wouldn't do this, but asked why? It seems like you at least like me. Did I do something wrong? No! You're not Jewish. I might fall in love with you and since I can't marry you, I need to just stop things now. Wow, I really wasn't prepared for that, but could understand it given that both her parents [whom I later met] were Holocaust survivors. Her bed was directly under mine so I used to joke that I slept on top of Debbie every night, albeit a floor apart.

So, we just stayed friends thru our gradation in May 1974 and ever since. Debbie went to Med School in Pittsburgh where Carol and I both have family so we saw her there a few times. We were invited to her wedding with Dr. Noah Bass and visited with them when they lived outside of Atlanta. Eventually, they moved back to Pittsburgh and we saw them regularly over the years. Readers might ask where is this all going. Well, last year Debbie and Noah both retired and decided to do an *Aliyah*, which is when Jewish folks return to live in Israel. One of their sons lives in Jerusalem and they missed seeing their grandkids for a few years because of Covid. We had dinner with them in Pittsburgh in May 2022 just before they moved to Israel. Debbie said you'll have to come visit us and that invite became this trip.

Years ago, there were daily USAIR flights between PHL and Tel Aviv [TLV]. Carol and I took them back in 2014. However, after the merger with AA, that route was dropped. So, looking for flights for this trip, we would have to connect somewhere in Europe. The most logical connection would be to British Airways at LHR. But I am not too thrilled flying on them saying they are BA[D] and connecting in LHR means changing terminals, which takes at least an hour. Instead, we flew on AA to Madrid [MAD] and then on Iberian to TLV. The return was an unusual routing but more on that later.

Sunday April 30th & Monday May 1st

Our flight across the pond was Sunday evening so at least for this flight, we did not need to catch an early train to PHL. Also, because we would be gone for 12 days, I did not want to leave our car at the train station. Instead, we just walked to PA RT 611, a block from our house, and caught SEPTA's #55 bus. We exited by the Noble train station and caught a train from there in the mid afternoon. We did have to change to an airport train once we were in Center City.

We used AA's int'l check-in in the A terminal. The AA lounge there is closed for remodeling so we walked over to the one between the B & C terminals. Originally, we had paid for premium



economy seats, but just before the flight, we were both upgraded to the business class cabin using a "systemwide upgrade". This is a special benefit that comes from achieving certain mileage thresholds and this is the 2nd time that we have received this benefit. We had two forward facing, center pods in the 2nd row, which was a very good thing. To fit more folks into the business class cabin of the

Boeing 787-9, half of the pods are REAR facing and this would NOT have worked for me.

The details of our flights are no longer available on the free version of FLIGHTAWARE that I use, but my notes said there was a long ground taxi before we took off. The flight was scheduled to leave PHL @ 655PM. Once in the air, we flew across NJ, Long Island and Cape Cod and then out over the Atlantic like shown in the pix on the first page at 41,000' with a ground speed over 600 MPH. We were wine and dined [dinner & breakfast] and I binge watched the whole 5th season of *Young Sheldon* before getting a few hours sleep. The flight arrived in MAD on Monday 5/1 at 747AM [why are most of my times plane times?] ahead of schedule [810AM]. We had been to Spain once back in the late 1990s with Colleen and Erin. After landing, we had to go thru a brief security check and then had some trouble finding the Iberian lounge. Once there, I took a shower and we stayed for three hours till our flight to TLV scheduled at 1140AM. However, our takeoff was delayed 45 minutes due to air traffic control issues.

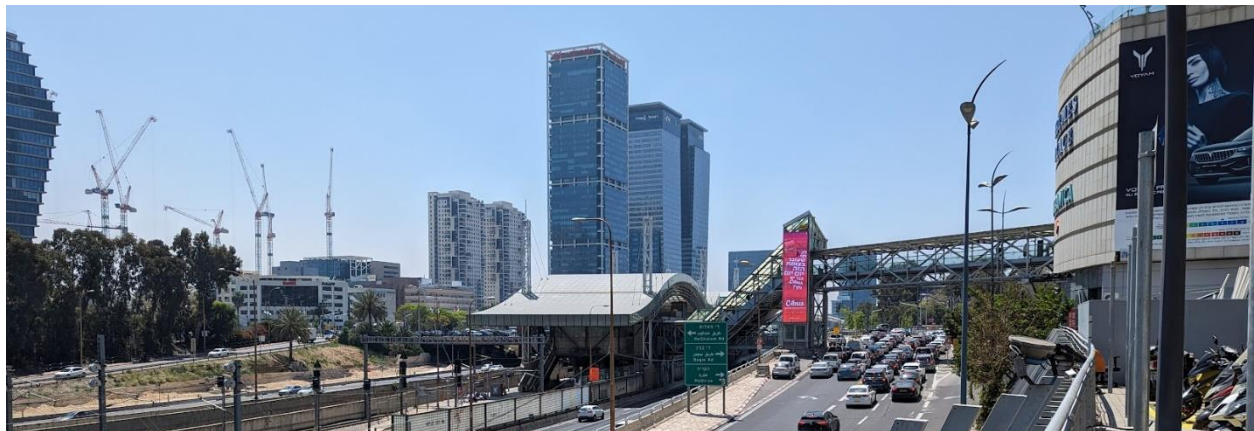
This flight was on an Iberian A321 and we had exit row seats. It was interesting to see how their inflight service differed from the USA. No choice of beverages – just a bottle of water with a snack sandwich. The flight route was different from that on the map on the first page. We arced to the NE and probably flew over France before flying diagonally across the Italian peninsula to the Balkans. The rest of the route was like on the map. We approached TLV from the Mediterranean Sea, passing over the large developed urban area and then over an empty area of rocky hills before circling back to land at the Ben Gurion Airport at 618PM [scheduled @ 525PM]. Looking at a map later, I saw we flew over the West Bank, or what some call Palestine. This was Carol's 2nd time there and my 3rd having flew there for a weekend back in Dec. 2012

when living in Bulgaria. It was a long walk to get to Immigration where there were lengthy queues. It seemed that groups with escorts kept being taken ahead of us. Eventually, we got thru and picked up our check bags.

We headed to the **Israel Railways** station that is just outside the terminal and below ground. In



recent years, the rail system there has undergone a major expansion with service now widely available thru out the densely populated coastal plain. There are four stations in Tel Aviv and like SEPTA's service thru Center City, the IR trains pass thru all four stations. We bought our tickets from a TVM for 9 shekels [NIS] each. There are approx. 3.6NIS to the USD so the fare was only \$4.97 for both of us. The ticket was used at entry and exit gates. We boarded a double-deck train heading north and exited at the 2nd station in Tel Aviv, **HaShalom**, that is located in the median of the Ayalon Highway. It is near the commercial center of the city and a major IDF base [we saw



scores of male and female troops, many carrying weapons, while near bye]. It is also adjacent to the **Azrieli Mall** where our Crown Plaza Hotel was located. Looking online, it seemed the hotel was a short distance from the station - NOT. First, we had to drag our bags up a long set of stairs [see in pix above] because the escalator was broken. We had a long way across the road to the railway's control gates into the mall. Once in the mall, did not see any signs for our hotel; there were ones in the train station. I could have asked someone [almost everyone speaks English] but decided to figure it out myself. We walked in the direction of the hotel but could not find an exit to it. So, we headed back to the mall's central core and took the escalators to street level. There with some help we found the hotel where we stayed for three nights. It was dark when we arrived so the pix above and the two on the next page were actually taken the next day.



We were given a room on the 23rd floor that had a nice view to the west. We were upgraded big time to their Presidential Suite. This had a dining table in a large living room, a separate bedroom and two bathrooms. Carol said the furnishings were too gaudy but I'll take it.



By now it was after 815PM, so we quickly headed back to the mall for dinner. There was a two level food court and some sit down places as well. In a hurry, we had Chinese in one of the food courts for \$21.82. We stopped at a small supermarket on the ground level so Carol could buy some sodas. Back in the room, it was an early night with the jet lag.

Tuesday May 2nd

This was our day to be in Tel Aviv. The Crown Plaza had a free shuttle van to another Crown Plaza that was on the Med so we went for a ride to the beach. It passed thru mostly residential



neighborhoods, some with classic 1930s Bauhaus buildings and there was lots of traffic. At one place, there was road construction, which I saw on the return trip was actually for a new light rail/tram line. Just a few folks were in the water..[When I was here in Dec. 2012, I saw folks swimming in the Med. I asked a local, “Isn’t the water cold”? The woman said, “oh those are the Ruzzians – they think the water is warm”.] We walked south for several blocks along a promenade. We came to a public beach where you could rent chairs, umbrellas, etc., but had to pay thru this machine. We had some drinks and snacks at a place on the beach and went up into the hotel lobby to wait for the van back to our hotel. Interestingly, there were guests from that hotel who were riding the shuttle van to go to the Azrieli Mall. We showed them where the mall’s entrance was. We went up to the room for a bit and then walked several blocks to the **Tel Aviv Museum of Art**.



This is a world class museum with an extensive collection of modern and contemporary art, most of which was donated or is on long-term loan.



We bought our tickets for that cost 60NIS [\$16.61] and were directed to an information desk where three women asked us why we came to Israel. I said it was a long story but started when I slept on top of Debbie... We saw this three-sided work as we entered. It was done by Yaacov Agam and is entitled *Pace of Time*. Ironically, we had seen a very similar work at the Carnegie Museum of Art on one of our visits to Pittsburgh. We covered several galleries, one of which was on the disappearance of Tel Aviv’s

classic architecture. Part of this exhibit were 3D printed models of classic buildings intended to

document them before they might be lost. We spent some time in the gift shop before heading



back a different way. Basically, we had to circle the IDF base and since it was the end of the day, we saw many troops heading home some of which were carrying weapons with them.

I always walk along the edge of the street when in urban areas looking for what I once called *mystery metal*. These are actually the tines from the brushes on a street cleaner. I have literally found them all over the world and this day made a major score. What do I do with them, you ask? Well, they are a perfect HO scale representation of steel bar stock that I use as loads in gondolas on my ICRR train layout.



Eventually we came to the entrance to the mall on the west side. Above the mall are three office towers, each of which is a different shape. The Crown Plaza is located in the middle building that is square. A new spiral shaped building is being added to the complex.

It was time for dinner so we stopped at **Black Burger** as soon as we were in the mall. Due to Kosher rules, restaurants that serve meat do NOT serve any



dairy products, so no butter or cheese. However, this place did offer a bacon cheeseburger of sorts, albeit with vegan cheese and lamb bacon. Dinner for both of us with sodas came to \$60.90 and tipping there is about 10%. We walked thru the mall a bit stopping for ice cream before heading back to our hotel.

Wednesday May 3rd

The Crown Plaza had a YUGE buffet for breakfast each day. This looked kind of like a bagel but tasted more like a bialy. I ate alone each day since Carol was drinking her keto shakes for breakfast each day and did not want to be tempted by the food.



This was a day of trains and travel for



us. We walked to the mall and from there exited into the train station. Of course, the escalator was working now. We bought two tickets [27NIS each for \$14.99 total] to Haifa that is about 95 kms. north along the coast. Our train was a diesel MU, but at least in Tel Aviv, the lines are also

electrified. Leaving Tel Aviv, it was largely agricultural with some fields covered with netting.



We wondered what they were growing. Turns out bananas. Later, the tracks were almost next to



the Med. The ride took just over an hour and we arrived at 1055AM at the Merkaz HaShmona [Center] Station, one of ten in Haifa. Haifa is Israel 3rd largest city with a population of some 283k folks.



Almost all of the signage in Israel that we saw was in Hebrew, English and Arabic. From the station, we walked several blocks to the **Carmelit**, an underground funicular railway built in the late 1950s. It is the oldest underground transit system in the Middle East. It is only 1.1 miles long with six stations but does climb almost 900'. The fare was 11NIS for both for us [\$3.05].



Once on the top, we walked several blocks to a promenade that had a spectacular view of Haifa and its port facilities.



We rode the Carmelit back down for the same fare. We walked back to the train station passing a bakery where I had eaten when there back in Dec. 2012. Along the way we passed this faux



sign that was done fairly recently by a group of local artists. However, Haifa does have a long history with the railways. The Ottoman Empire built the Hejaz Railways in the early 1900s, a narrow-gauge [1050 mm or 3' 5 11/32"] railway that ran from Damascus to Medina in Saudi Arabia. The Jezreel Valley Railway was branch line of the Hejaz to Haifa from Deraa (Syria). During WWI, the Hejaz Railway was repeatedly attacked by irregular guerilla troops lead by *Lawrence of Arabia*.



Back in the station, we got in a cab to take us to the **Israel Railway Museum** that is located in the Haifa [East] Railway Station that was built in 1904 as the western terminus of the Jezreel Valley railway. In the 1920s, under the British Mandate,

Palestine Railways extended the Eastern Railway north from Tel Aviv to connect with the Jezreel Valley Railway at Haifa Station. At that time, Haifa was the only place in the world to have direct railway services to three continents: Istanbul in Europe, Kantarah in Africa [another line ran from Tel Aviv across the Egyptian Sinai and then across the Suez Canal], and Medina in Asia.

Because the museum is located in an active railyard, that we crossed on a long overhead walkway, we had to show and leave our drivers licenses at the entry gate. The museum has some pieces in the main building but most of the collection that dates back to the Hejaz Railway, is outside on several tracks. I paid a 15NIS admission fee [\$4.16] while Carol sat outside by picnic table reading a book. I took about 25 pictures and so what follows here is just a





sampling of what I saw. Each piece of equipment was identified with a tri-lingual sign. It was interesting that each time Israel fought its Arab neighbors [1948/1956/1967], it captured RR equipment that was brought to Israel and used by Israel Railways. This narrow gauge steam engine was built in Germany in 1902 and was used until 1948. It is believed to be the oldest complete steam engine in Israel.



The top of this car [*The Hillmens Pride*] in camo paint was made out of concrete and used by the British Army as a mobile defense post, during the 1936-9 disturbances in the Palestine Mandate when it was equipped with several Lewis machine guns. The sign said it is sitting on a USA-made flat car but to me the car and trucks look European. Most of the early rolling stock in the museum was made in Europe or the UK.



This engine was built in the USA by EMD as a G16S export model in 1960 for the Egyptian Railways. It was captured by Israel during the Six-Day War [1967] and incorporated into the Israel Railway running on freight lines in the Negev Desert.



This was by far the most unusual piece of equipment in the collection. An American-made, International Harvester farm tractor has been converted into a shunting tractor. I took about 10 pixs of it and hope to make a HO scale model of it.

We left the museum and did not see any taxis so we ended up walking back; it wasn't that far but it was hot. Had we known this, we could have walked there from the Carmelit station and saved the 35 NIS taxi fare. Back at the train station, we took another taxi to see the **Baha'i Temple and Gardens**. The Baha'i faith is an eastern religion that has its world headquarters in Haifa. Unfortunately, when we were there, the Baha'is were holding their annual world congress and the garden ground were closed to outsiders. This is how the gardens look from the station.



This is the view from the top.



This is the view from the bottom.



I should have agreed on a fare before the trip because when back at the station, the taxi driver charged us 150NIS [approx. \$42]. We gave him all the Israeli money we had and paid the difference in USD. In retrospect, he drove us for almost 45 minutes and stopped three times [top/ middle/bottom] at the Gardens that were spectacular.



We brought our tickets in the station for the same fare [54 NIS] and soon boarded an older train to Tel Aviv. This train was more crowded than the train in the morning and we did not get seats together. I sat next to an active duty IDF officer and was able to ask him a lot of questions. He lives in Jerusalem and works in the IDF base by our hotel. When I asked him what he did he said he was an officer so he spent his time in the office. HAH However, one day a week he worked at a defense contractor that was in Haifa. Just over an hour later, we were back in Tel Aviv's HaShalom Station.



As we exited the train, I could not help but notice this female soldier on the platform with an assault rifle and a shopping bag. In case you are wondering, there is now a sizable population of what were originally Ethiopian [black] Jews living in Israel who were brought from Ethiopia in several waves from the late 1970s to the early 1990s.

Leaving the station, we headed right into the mall for dinner. Eating here each night was part of the reason for picking the hotel next to the mall.

Readers may recall we did the same thing on our trip to Helsinki last August. We ended up getting our food separately. I got a decent pizza for \$16.38 and Carol had a chicken salad to eat.



Thursday May 4th

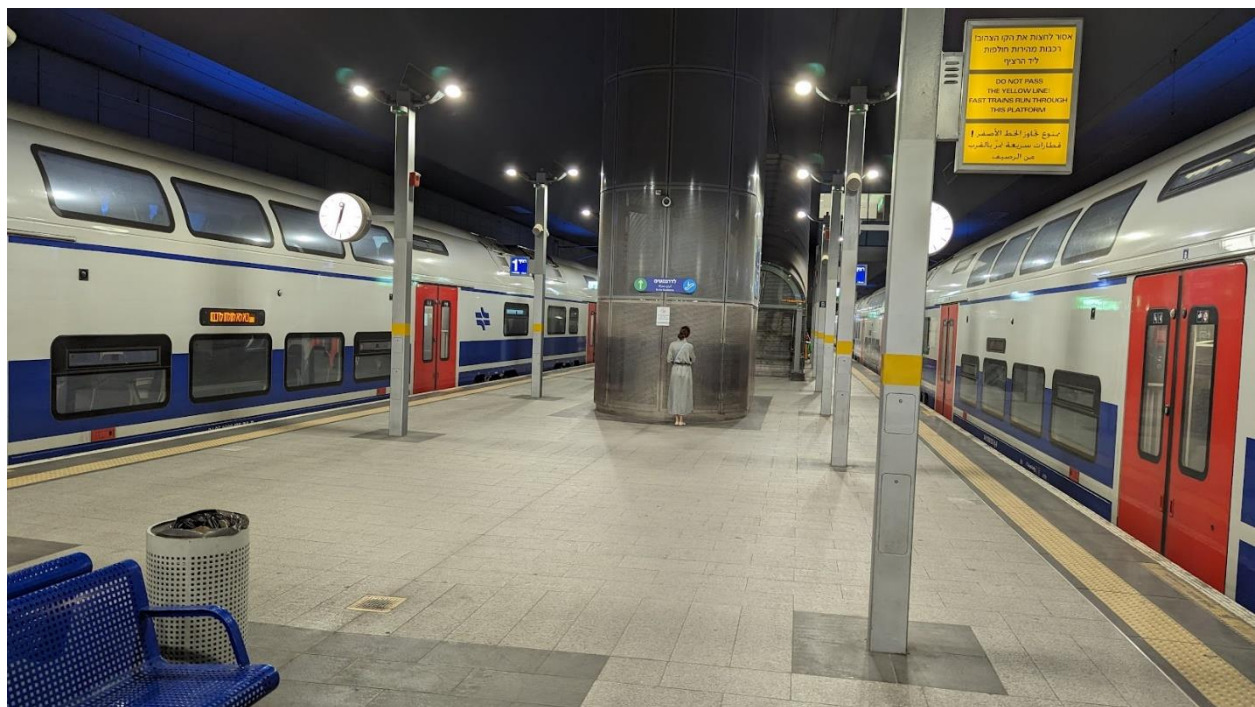
We checked out of the hotel and walked to the HaShalom Station to catch a train to Jerusalem where Debbie and Noah live. They had Hebrew class that day and said not to arrive until after 1PM. Near the station, there was a left-wing political demonstration protesting proposed changes to the structure of Israel's supreme court. by *Bibi Netanyahu's* center/right government.



An interesting side note is that Bibi and his older brother Yonatan, who was killed leading the rescue of hijacked passengers in Entebbe Uganda in 1976, both graduated from Cheltenham PA High School.

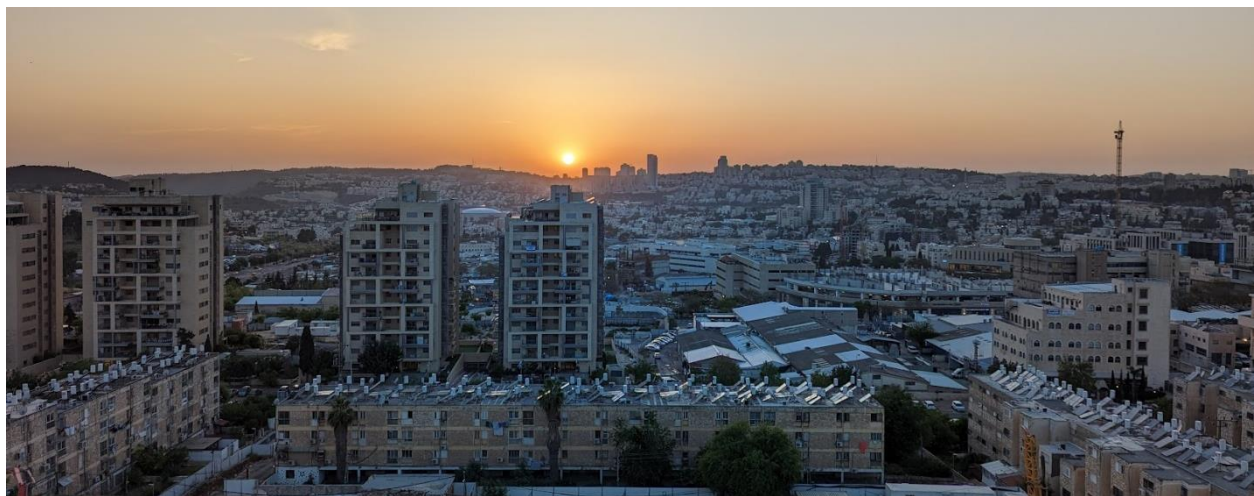
There has long been a rail line to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv dating back to the Ottoman times. Israel took control of the line after the 1948 War of Independence and reopened it in 1949 after a treaty with Jordan. The line ran into the late 1990s and was upgraded and reopened in the 2005. Carol and I took the train from Jerusalem's Malha Station to Tel Aviv back in 2014 and it was a slow train that wound itself thru the mountains avoiding the Palestinian controlled areas on the West Bank. Construction of the new line actually started in 2001 and the first part built was the connection between Tel Aviv and the Ben Gurion Airport. The project suffered numerous financial, administrative and construction delays. Much of the line is underground or on long trestles. The two track electrified line eventually reached Jerusalem in 2018. While some call it a high speed line, the max speed is only 160 KM/HR [99MPH]. However, the 35-mile long line has yet to reach its final destination in central Jerusalem, as for now the line ends 80 meters (260') under Jerusalem's Central Bus Station. This is the deepest heavy rail station in the world. The new Madison Station under GCT in NYC is just 150' below street level.

The fare from HaShalom was 24 NIS each or \$13.27 in total. The train took 37 minutes and of course it was train #737. It then took over 15 minutes to get from the platforms, of which there are two each with two tracks, to the street level after riding six escalators, three of which looked like the one pictured on the next page.





Once outside, I looked for a certain bus line that went near Debbie's apartment in the southern part of the city. Jerusalem's light rail was also there but didn't go in the right direction. I could not find the bus and even if we did, we would have needed a fare card to ride. So, we hopped in a taxi and were at their apt. building about 20 minutes later for 100NIS [approx. \$28]. The driver called up to say we were there. Debbie and Noah came down to meet us even though she has some mobility issues and uses a walker. They took us up to their 10th floor apartment that has a clear view to the west. It is in a complex of newer buildings that is only a few blocks



from their son's apartment. Their apartment was actually two floors as there were stairs up to three more rooms and a bathroom. It was so good to see them. I had been in contact with Debbie for the weeks before as we finalized our travel arrangements. We sat and talked all afternoon before having dinner with them in the apartment. One of the things we talked about was what Carol and I would do on the Sabbath which they observe and that lasts from sunset on Friday till 45 minutes after sundown on Saturday.

Friday May 5th

We had some light breakfast. Before we left the US, I asked Debbie if she needed us to bring anything. She asked for some large zip lock bags so we had three boxes of them in our luggage. Eventually, three of us walked to the corner while Debbie rode an electric scooter to the bus stop. They do not have a car and use buses or taxis when they need to go somewhere. There is extensive bus service in Jerusalem. However, the buses do not accept money; one must have an electronic fare card. Debbie had two extras cards that Carol and I were able to use.



Turns out we should have borrowed them but more on that issue later. We took the bus

to **The First Station** that is now a major center of entertainment, culture and food set in what was the original **Jerusalem Railway Station** built in 1892 for the Jerusalem to Jaffa [an ancient port city that is the oldest part of Tel Aviv] railway line. The station was last used for rail service in 1998. It is a place that they go to regularly and was perfect for me given my interests.





The original standard gauge tracks are still in place. There was a mix of vendors selling from carts and others in buildings one of which was made from a used shipping container. We walked around and then sat down to have some pastries and beverages. Debbie was particularly interested in showing me one thing there but



when we got there, it was closed. So, we walked around some more and came later and this passenger car was open with this HO scale, Marklin train European layout inside.



At this point, we split up and they took the bus back to their apartment to get ready for the Sabbath. They have to prepare their evening meal in advance. Carol and I walked several blocks to the **Menachem Begin Heritage Center** that has a unique view of the Old City [see next page]. Debbie had made a reservation for us to be on the 1PM English language tour. The admission for both of us was 40NIS [\$11.06]. I certainly was aware of Menachem Begin but the Center covered his life story in great detail showing how it was intertwined with the early history the State of Israel. The material was presented thru printed displays and some video clips. He was born a Russian, became a Polish Zionist, came to Israel during WWII with the Free Polish Army, joined the Irgun and became its commander, later led the opposition in Israel's Knesset, and ultimately become Israel's sixth Prime Minister who initiated the peace treaty with Egypt. He lived a very simple life. The museum has the furniture from his Tel Aviv apartment, as well as his personal library. The Center is associated with the Israel State Archives so visiting it was like going to see the US Presidential libraries that are on of Carol's bucket lists.



Leaving the Center, we walked around the gardens before heading back to The First Station for lunch. I had what is called chicken schnitzel; we would call them chicken fingers. Note, the sesame seeds that were on many of the foods we ate in Israel. We stopped in a convenience store to buy some diet sodas for Carol. We took the bus from The First Station down Hebron Ave. to where they live.

We arrived before sundown. Later, one of the elevators in their building goes into Sabbath mode meaning it goes up and down stopping at every floor continuously, opening and closing the doors automatically so those observing the Sabbath can ride it without doing any work. We had a very nice meal with them. They said prayers and gave several blessings. The food was good but it is a bit strange not being able to have butter on my bread. At nighttime, they left the lights on in the living room.

Saturday May 6th

We had to do things by ourselves, which was not a problem. However, there is no bus service in most of Jerusalem on the Sabbath so to get to the Old City I had to download an app called GETT, a local version of Lyft/Uber. The drivers are mostly Arab Israelis, some of which are Christian. We used it for two rides that day that were processed thru my AMEX account [\$16.05 & \$17.48]. The first ride was from their apartment to **Gethsemane**, located east of the Old City in what is technically part of the West Bank. This was the olive garden where Jesus prayed to be



delivered from his impending suffering, while also accepting God's will. Next to the garden now is a beautiful Franciscan church. The whole area was full of tour buses.



Near by was the **Church of Mary Magdalene**. We could see it on the hill but could not figure out how to get there. Instead, we found our way into the massive **Mount of Olives Cemetery**.



Leaving there, we went into an orthodox church and grotto where I talked with some pilgrims from Romania. Across the street is the supposed **Tomb of Mary** which is one of nine contested religious sites in the Holy Land under the *Status Quo Agreement* that was formalized

under the 1878 Treaty of Berlin. However, the basic understanding of the agreement dates back to the late 1600s. Eastern rite religions believe this is the burial site of the Mother of God, while Catholics believe she was assumed into Heaven. It was a long walk down many steps to an underground shrine and grotto. There were many lanterns hanging from the ceiling.

We tried to take a taxi but the drivers there all wanted ridiculous fares to take us to the **Notre Dame Center of Jerusalem** on the other side of the Old City by the New Gate. Finally, we found an honest taxi driver who drove us there using the meter. I don't call the fare but it was very reasonable.



Carol and I had been to the Center on our last visit. It is a hotel with other facilities and most important for us, it had a 630PM vigil mass in English. We had lunch there – chicken for Carol



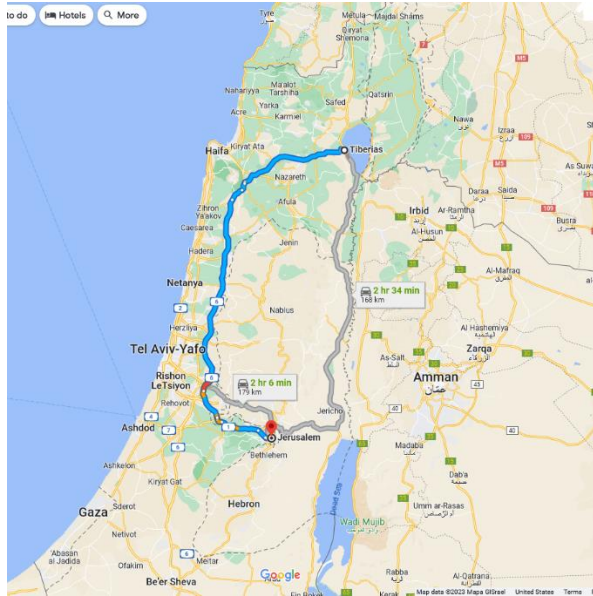
and fajita wraps for me. The lunch cost us 140NIS [\$38.57]. We left the Center, crossed the street and came to the New Gate that passes thru the thick ancient stone walls of the Old City. When we were here in 2014, we got lost in the Jewish Quarter and ended up on the roofs to find where we were. The Old City is a maze of alleys with merchant stalls, and various Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious sites. We stopped in several Catholic churches, all of which had plaques commemorating various papal visits. At one store, Carol bought a nice cotton shirt made in India for \$20. Our last stop was at the **Church of the Holy Sepulcher**, which is the most contested of the nine holy sites under the *Status Quo Agreement*. The church is shared among six Christian denominations and is believed to be built on the site of Christ's crucifixion and it contains several of Stations of the Cross. The door was closed when we got there and there was a large crowd waiting to get in. Eventually the door opened and folks came out as we entered. Inside by one shrine, there was a large seemingly Catholic procession with priests, a bishop and other religious.



We made our way out of the Old City back to the Notre Dame Center for the mass. Interestingly, a man seemingly dressed like Jesus whom we had seen in the procession at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was at the mass as well. We took a GETT taxi back to Debbie and Noah's apt and had a late dinner with them after the Sabbath had ended. Carol did our laundry so we would have clean clothes for the rest of the trip. It was a real experience using their dryer that had a built in dehumidifier that needed to be emptied.

Sunday May 7th

This was our last day in Jerusalem but not our last day with Debbie and Noah. In planning the visit, Debbie told me that they were going on vacation on May 7th. I asked where they were going – Tiberius on the Sea of Galilee. I asked if we could come with them? Sure! Noah rented a bigger car to accommodate us and our luggage plus their luggage and Debbie's walker and scooter. We packed up the car and were off.



Looking at this map, it seems that Tiberias was directly north of Jerusalem. However, to drive that way would mean a long trip thru the West Bank, which is unsafe. A British-Israeli family driving there in April during Passover was attacked and three of them were killed. While we were there, Israeli forces tracked down and killed the suspected gunmen.

So, instead Noah got on the highway to Tel Aviv and then took Route 6 north. We drove right by the Crown Plaza Hotel where we stayed. This trip was about 180 kms. [112 miles] and took a few hours because of traffic and a stop for a nice lunch at the Tishi Winery in Binyamina. I paid 340NIS [\$93.66] for all four of us.

Eventually, we came to the outer part of Tiberias and as we drove to the **Club Hotel Tiberias**, we passed a sign that said SEA LEVEL. The hotel faced the Sea of Galilee and was a 00s of feet above it but still below sea level. We ended up eating dinner at the hotel, which had a large buffet. Again, it was strange to have bread without butter. The hotel was a bit dated resort and



these days it largely hosts bus tour groups. The manager put country flags on each table depending on where the folks were from. I saw flags from India, Poland, Israel and Romania. Debbie had booked thru a Marriott timeshare arrangement they have. I reserved thru Booking.com.

Monday May 8th

I joined them for the buffet breakfast and at least then, I could have some butter. The two buffet dinners and one buffet breakfast for me cost 380NIS [\$104.68]. Carol continued to have her diet shakes but did come to the buffet to get some ice. Noah got the car and we set out for the day. Tiberias is an ancient city that dates back to Roman times and even earlier. Today, it is a city of 47k folks and is popular both with foreign tourists/pilgrims as well as Israelis on vacation. This is the view of the Sea of Galilee from the hotel. The Sea is actually a large freshwater lake that



is approx. 210 meters *below* sea level. In fact, it is the lowest freshwater lake on Earth and the second lowest lake in the world after the Dead Sea that is a saltwater lake. It is approximately 53 km. in circumference, about 21 km. long, and 13 km. wide. The depth averages about 20 meters. The Jordan River flows into and out of the lake although its exit is now controlled by a dam. At night from our hotel window, I could see lights out on the water from fishing boats.



We drove down to the Sea and took this picture of our hotel. We were heading to Ginosar, about 10 kms away, that is the location of the **Galilee's Miracles Center**. This museum cost 100NIS or \$27.55 for all four of us. It houses an ancient fishing boat found in 1985 by two local fishermen when a severe drought caused the Sea's shoreline to recede. The boat has been scientifically dated back to the 1st century BCE-CE. One can only speculate if this boat was actually used by the apostles who left their fishing boats to become fishers of men. Or perhaps it is a boat that Jesus actually stood in. We will never know for sure, at least not in this world.



We had some snacks there for lunch and then headed to the **Arbel National Park & Natural Reserve** [22NIS \$6.06]. Debbie and Noah have an annual pas that lets them into all the national parks for free. This is up on a sheer cliff that is 00s of feet above the water level. It offers magnificent views of the Sea and the Golan Heights. On a clear day, you can supposedly see all the way to Mt. Hermon, the highest spot in Israel at 2,814 meters (9,232 ft) above sea level. That mountain is the location of Israel's only ski resort. It was too cloudy to see Mt. Hermon but did have this view of Ginosar. We saw dense patches of green orchards throughout Israel even though the country is mostly desert. The Israelis are the best in the world with drip irrigation.



We headed back into the city proper to visit **Hamat Teverys National Park** [14NIS \$3.86]. This is a site of hot springs that was mentioned in a 13th century *BCE* text. There also are the remains of three synagogues that date back to the 2nd thru 8th centuries CE. The last one has

been partially excavated along with the ruins of a Roman era bathhouse. There was amazing



detail in the tile floor that was approx.. 1500 years old. Behind the park is the tomb of Rabbi Meir the Miracle Worker, one of the greatest Talmudic rabbis. We drove back to the hotel and went swimming for a bit.

For dinner, we drive to the central part of the city and ate at **Avi's Restaurant**, recommended by their son named Avi. For dinner, I had Galilean tilapia that is locally called "St. Peter's fish".



Carol had a meat dish and the dinner for the two of us w/ a bottle of local wine for the four of us cost 300NIS [\$82.64]

Tuesday May 9th

For breakfast, we all skipped the buffet and ate some baked goods we had bought the day before in Tiberias. We drove in the rental car heading towards Ginosar but kept going until we were deep in the Golan Heights. Israel seized the Golan Heights from Syria in Six Day War and unlike the West Bank, it has been fully integrated into Israel. Our first stop was here in Qatsrin.



This is Israel's 3rd largest winery and one owned by several local kibbitzes that grow the grapes near by. We had a tour and tasting. Their wine is Kosher and when I asked what makes the wine Kosher, the guide said do you have an hour and a half. Leaving there we went into town



and ate like the locals. I had a chicken Sharma with a mojito soda. I guess I paid cash as I don't see a charge for it. After lunch, we stopped at the near by open-air **Katzrin Museum**, the site of an ancient village and synagogue and then went to an associated museum

in the town. We were the only folks there and the man at the front desk gave us a great guided tour. He made us replicas of a 1st century coin that was found near by. The guide's last name was Bass, same as Noah's.



We also stopped at a grocery store and bought more breakfast food. I was surprised to see that the store had a reverse vending machine for deposit bottles/cans. Noah knew he was paying



something [.30NIS] with each beverage purchase but did know how the return process worked. Machines like this are common in US states with deposit programs. My son-in-law Ed works for a company in CT that supplies such machines to Stop 'n Shop and other grocery stores. On the way back, we passed a military museum that was closed but I was able to get this picture of an updated Sherman tank. This is the so called *Super Sherman*, a



modified version of the American WWII M4 Sherman tank. The Super Sherman was used by the Israeli Defense Forces from the mid-1950s to early 1980s.



Back in Tiberias, we went to dinner at **El Rancho** -a steak restaurant. Almost every place we ate at had their name printed in English on their napkins. I saved them to help identify the various places as the credit card receipts were just in Hebrew. This is the napkin from El Rancho. It was on the same street as the Avi Restaurant and both were owned by the same company as both charges say El Rancho. I had an Entrecote steak which seemed like a rib eye. The four of us were served this assortment of salads with our entrees. I paid for dinner and it was 415NIS [\$114.54]

Wednesday May 10th & Thursday May 11th

May 10th was our last day in Tiberias, even though our plane home actually left on May 11th. After breakfast, I headed to the pool for a quick swim. I was the only one there till Debbie and Noah came down. Meanwhile Carol was packing up our dirty clothes. Eventually, we went back to our rooms. I went downstairs about 11AM to check out. The bill had already been paid. I paid



1821 NIS [\$502.47] for the three nights, which I guess was ok. We loaded our suitcases in the car and headed to the promenade along the Sea. There was a Catholic Church there [St. Peter's of course] but it was closed. We walked to the end of the promenade and saw this artwork that makes the Sea seem to be shaped like Africa. We had lunch at **Galei Gil Tveria**, one of the waterfront restaurants. I had more St Peter's fish, but this time filleted.



Carol had meat on a stick.



I could see fish in the Sea as we were eating. The catfish whooped down the skin of my fish that I threw into the water. I paid for lunch for all four of us; it was 445 NIS [\$122.76]



We got back to their rental car. Noah stopped to buy gas and I noted the price was 6.81NIS per liter that works out to about \$7.16 per gallon. On the back of almost sign in Israel, we saw was this image. I knew who it was – Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, a famous Lubavitcher Rebbe who died in NYC in 1994. I saw his followers all the time when I worked in NYC from 1976-1979. During his lifetime and even now, many of his adherents believed that he was the Messiah.

We were driven to Tiberias' Central Bus Station. We were planning to take a bus to Haifa and then the train from there to TLV. But we had a problem. The intercity bus did not accept cash. If I had known this, the easiest thing would have been to borrow one of Debbie's extra fare cards. I tried to download an app called *Moveit* that would let us ride the bus w/o a fare card but could not get the app to work and this probably resulted on my Barclay Aviator card being hacked. The bus fare was 16NIS each and I had 40NIS in bills. I tried to get someone to pay for us with their card and give them the fare in NIS -nope. One young woman said I could buy a fare card and put money on it at a store. I bought the card for 5NIS but for some reason could only put 30NIS on the card. A bus came and would not let us in because I did not have the enough NIS on the card to pay the 32NIS fare. Someone else said I could put more money on the fare card with a



credit card but as it turned out only in multiples of 30NIS. So, I walked over to the window for the bus company and put an additional 30NIS [\$8.28] on the card. This got us on the bus which took about 75 minutes to cover some 65 kms. Most of the route was highway but the bus got off at almost every exit to serve the local bus stop and then got back on the highway. Most of the



areas we passed were heavily developed agriculture like this. We arrived at Haifa's **HaMifratz**



Central Bus station that is connected to the railway station with the same name. The train fare was 27NIS and after paying for 32NIS bus fare for both of us, there was 28 NIS on the card that I could use to pay my fare. I charged Carol's 27NIS ticket [\$7.45]. This station was further up the line then where we had been in Haifa on Wednesday. We went past the Railway Museum and then the Merkaz HaShmona Station. There was a large cruise ship in the port as we passed by. I was not sure of the ultimate destination of the train but it took us right to



TLV. Above is a picture of the locomotive of the train we rode in the airport station.

Once inside the terminal at about 730PM, we were early for check-in. You see our flight was scheduled for **1220AM on Thursday May 11th** ! Boarding would not begin until 915PM. Luckily there was an area with chairs where we could sit down and buy some food while we waited. We walked back to the AA counter some time after 9 and saw there was already a long line. I guess we should have got in line sooner. Eventually, we were checked in for our premium economy seats – no system wide upgrade this time on AA145 to JFK. I booked this instead of a BA connection and knowing that AA *does not* fly from JFK to PHL. The plane was a Boeing 777-200ER with four classes – business/premium economy/main cabin extra/ coach for a total of 273 seats. We cleared immigrations and security and were able to use the DAN lounge. This is a small facility that we had used on our 2014 flight to PHL and certainly better than nothing.

We eventually boarded the plane and it was a total mess. The plane was full; a large % of the passenger were Hasidic with the males carrying their hat boxes and the women carrying babies. It took a long time before everyone was in the plane and seated. A senior flight attendant had to



make several announcements. I don't recall what time we left. But once we were up in the air, it was much the same as the Hasidim were walking in the aisles, bowing, saying their prayers, etc.

We got a meal and I wasn't tired so I watched *Anchorman 2*, a funny stupid movie with Will Ferrell. We started at 32K feet and later climbed to 36K feet. At one point, there was an 80 MPH headwind but this seemed to be built into the schedule as we were at the gate at JFK at 5AM, which was 33 minutes ahead of schedule and 30 minutes *before* CBE opened. So, we were kept on the plane but the Hasidism immediately stood and filled the aisles. Once inside, there was a line for CBE. We recovered our checked bags and cleared customs with no problems. I rechecked out bags for our next flight to Boston. Yes, BOS because AA does NOT fly to PHL from JFK. We could have left the airport and taken a taxi to LGA and flown to PHL or flown from JFK to CLT then PHL. BOS made more sense since it



was closer and I could have a lobster roll. We headed to the AA lounge to get some food. Normally we don't get to use the lounge [for free] on domestic flights but this flight was part of an int'l itinerary.

The BOS flight was scheduled to depart at 909AM and arrive at 1043AM. I was upgraded but Carol was not. We took off to the south and then made a loop back over Long Island. We



passed right byer Island Park [near Long Beach] where some of my Liggan relatives lived for decades and where my family summered in 1957. Arriving in Logan, it was interesting to see this Air Canada A220 plane in a heritage livery at a near bye gate.



We were also able to use the AA lounge in BOS for a while as our flight to PHL was not scheduled until 1221PM. We left the lounge about 1130AM; Carol headed to the gate while I headed to **Legal Seaford** to get a lobster roll. I had looked online and saw they cost \$49 each so Carol suggested we split one. I ordered it that way and got two boxes each with fries and cole slaw plus I added a chowdah to the order. The food came quickly and I headed to meet Carol at

the gate. However, just as I got there, the gate agent said that the flight was over sold and she needed two volunteers.... I was standing at the counter before she finished her sentence. Yes, the flight was oversold; we each received a \$500 voucher that we have already used towards an October trip to Phoenix [PHX]. We sat down and ate our lobster rolls and I had my chowdah. We went back to the AA lounge as we rebooked on a 415PM flight to PHL and guess what they were serving for lunch? -clam chowdah! I was upgraded again. I lost my notes saying when we got home but it probably was around 8PM. We did take a LYFT from the train station to home that cost \$14.

This is a picture of Debbie and Noah in their apartment. We hope to see them again later this year when they are back in the States for several weeks.



Miles, points, money, etc.

Because of the airfare and the distance flown, this trip was *very* rewarding. I got 3,546 loyalty points and 10,692 award miles when I purchased the tickets several months ago. For the actual flights, I earned 18.095 loyalty point/award miles. Carol earned 13,160. We flew 12,033 miles RT that count towards AA's Million Miler award. Because of our sequent flights, the cum totals after this trip are meaningless.

I paid for two nights at the Crown Plaza that cost 1888.10NIS [\$521.60] and used our annual free night from the CHSE IHG card for the 3rd night. I earned 10,986 points for the stay and received another 5,216 for using their affinity credit card. The hotel cost was more than what we normally spend but it was worth it given the location and convenience.

We had no problem charging relatively small amounts. There did not seem to be any fee for using a credit card that is becoming more common in the USA these days. We exchanged some euros for NIS at the airport and made two ATM withdrawals totaling 600 NIS [\$166] at a bank by our hotel in Tel Aviv. We spent most of that on the taxi fares and the purchase of the bus fare card.

We earned points/miles for all the meals and other charged purchases. The hotel reservation in Tiberias thru **Booking.com** helps me achieve Genuis status there, which can get me a 15% discount on future reservations.