

Smokey the bear and Kathy Dedini

When Lydia and I decided to go to Washington D.C. to celebrate our 35th wedding anniversary last December, we didn't rush off. In fact, we planned to go in April, but finally took off the last of May. The delay was worth it. We got a lot of advice, almost all of it good, and a lot of help from our friends, of the kind we will remember with gratitude.

We shopped around for air fare bargains. I called ads pushing cheap tickets in the Sunday travel section, and discovered airline ticket buying in Baghdad-on-the-Peninsula has more than a passing resemblance to buying rugs in Persia.

Finally we paid a visit to Henderson Travel in Linda Mar Center, half a mile from our house. Kathy Dedini got to work with a smile, shopped around on her computer and got us tickets cheaper than any of the cheap ticket places, then demonstrated to a couple of inexperienced travelers how a good travel agent thinks. She reserved seats A and C toward the rear of the plane because that gave us a window seat and an aisle seat. Since they load from the front, she said, it's likely seat B will remain empty and give you more room. That's how it worked out.

I didn't discuss with Kathy that I'd been letting my fingers do the walking

through the travel section. I'm sure we would have gotten the same excellent service from Sheila Hyman of Tanforan Travel or any other Pacifica travel expert. Fact is, we got it from Kathy. We're happy we did.

One bit of advice we got from our friends was to contact Congressman Lantos' office. The folks in his local office came through splendidly. It would have been even better if we'd given them several months warning instead of a few weeks. We didn't call until we had our plane reservations. That meant the quota for the White House tour and a couple of other popular destinations had been filled.

Of the several tours Lantos' office arranged, one of the most enjoyable was of the State Department reception rooms in Foggy Bottom. We discovered a good rule of thumb. If the tour docent is a senior citizen, a retired volunteer, the tour guide will be

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knowledgeable, interested and very helpful. If the guide is a hired young person, it won't be nearly as much fun, or nearly as educational. Our FBI building tour guide, for example, gave her talk in a hurried, low monotone, as if she was embarrassed to be there.

One young man, however, was a real pleasure. His name was Jesse. We saw him first at the Lincoln Memorial. About 20, well scrubbed, with a neat pony tail under his Smokey Bear hat, he spoke knowledgeably and enthusiastically about both the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. We saw him next at the Washington Monument, just as pleasant and helpful. Interestingly enough, Horace and Marian Hinshaw also remembered him from their recent D.C. trip.

We enjoyed visiting the standard tourist attractions but it was the serendipitous discoveries that were most fun. More of that in another column.