MORE THOUGHTS ON TRAVEL

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Category: Observations

I spent a lazy day yesterday, despite waking up far too early because of jetlag. I tried hard to find a free wifi network and eventually ended up in a McDonalds, where I had to pay 3 dollars for the free connection. It seemed to make sense at the time.

Here are some random, and quite possibly innacurate observations about the USA.

- Customer service is a huge value: people serving in shops go out of their way to be friendly and don't look at you as though you are an idiot when you can't figure out the currency (all the notes are the same colour and change is confusing everywhere). The one exception is the guy in McDonalds who was happy to tell me that they had free internet, but that I'd have to pay for it because they had run out of coupons.
- Not all American cars are huge, but the roads are wide. This is a big country and they have plenty of space: roads, gardens, carparks; everything is on a larger scale than our cramped little island. Mind you, though the roads are big, the speed limits are low - and people tend to obey them. No queues of cars bumper to bumper doing ninety odd in the fast lane here.
- When you can't get BBC Radio Four or the World Service, National Public Radio in the US is a good alternative. I listened to Prarie Home Companion and an excellent broadcast on the situation in Georgia yesterday; very good indeed.
- Watching TV in the US isÂ painful. It's not that the programmes are bad, many of the best programmes in the UK are made in the States, after all. But there are so many advertisement breaks (and the adverts are bad) that you can never really concentrate on the programme. The BBC with no advertisements, or commercial British TV with fewer but longer breaks (ideal for making a cup of tea) is much to be preferred.
- Being an (unsweetened) muesli eater, I purposefully bought some healthy (seven grains, lots of fruit) breakfast cereal. It was a bit of a shock to tuck into it and find that it was incredibly sweet. It's very nice, but not what I'd expect from a healthy cereal. No doubt I missed something that would have told me that this was a sugar-loaded healthy cereal, but sometimes when you are foreign you just don't notice the signs.
- This has to be one of the most friendly and welcoming places on the planet.
- No matter where you go in the world, you will see more insects than any other wildlife. Florida has alligators, manatees and what have you, but the only interesting thing I've seen are tons of dragonflies. At least they don't carry malaria!