

US diary 2015

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1. This year I and my wife Nandini went to US to visit our daughter and son-in-law, have a vacation and meet our friends.
2. We visited the beautiful Acadia National Park in Maine with our daughter Noorie and her husband Navin. They both live near Princeton, N.J. We flew from Newark to Boston and then drove from Boston to Bar Harbor-the drive taking about 7 hours.



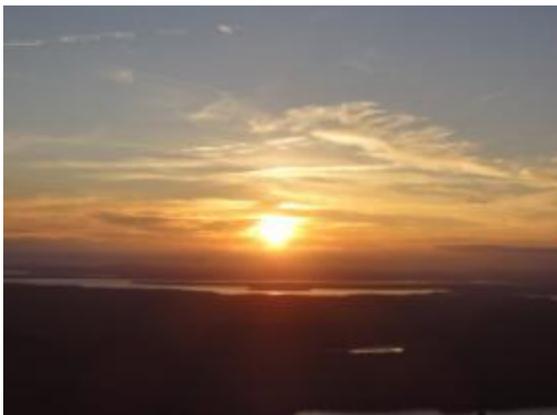
botanical nature trail and also took the Sea cruise.

3. Bar Harbor is a small town which is closest to the park. The 47,000 acres park is situated in Mount Desert Island. There are lovely hikes in the park and its borders can also be observed by sea-boat excursion trips. We did a 4.8 km hike on seashore; did a

4. The highest point of Acadia is Cadillac Mountain (CM). We drove to it on a completely foggy day. The mist was so thick that we could not see more than a couple of meters. The mist covered Cadillac Mountain was a great experience.



5. Generally CM is full of tourists and hence it is difficult to park the car on the top but on the misty day it was completely empty with only one or two cars.



6. We again went the next day to Cadillac to see the beautiful sunset. From top of Cadillac the whole Bar Harbor is visible. The sunset was mesmerizing with vivid colors of the sky highlighted by clouds on the horizons. We were actually supposed to see the sunrise around 5 a.m., but

cancelled the plan due to extreme cloudiness.

7. We also sampled the sea food of Maine. All the restaurants in Bar Harbor were jam packed (being tourist season) and so reservation had to be done in advance and sometimes the wait period was a couple of hours.
8. In fact all over US we found this phenomenon of long waiting periods in restaurants. Apparently Americans are eating out more and more and with bigger and bigger portions and helpings. Looking at the crowd in most of these restaurants one does not see any poverty.
9. We also spent a lovely week in Gainesville where we visited our Alma Mater University of Florida (UF). The visit was mainly to see our friends in Gainesville, but I also gave a lecture to the incoming 100 + freshmen engineers.



10. University of Florida (UF) has started a program entitled “holistic engineering” in which they propose to make the engineers aware of other facets of life specially happiness and wholesome living. I gave an [inspirational talk](#) to them on this subject.

11. This time in UF Campus we hardly saw any bicycles. All the students either drive a car or scootys on campus. Most of the bicycle stands have therefore been

converted into scooty stands. This is also causing the increase of obesity among students.

Construction on Reitz Union lawns



12. In 1970s UF used to be a beautiful campus with large open grounds and spaces between the buildings. This time we saw large number of new buildings being built on the campus. The spaces have reduced and cluttering of buildings is marring the beauty of the campus. There seems to be

huge amount of money being poured in buildings and infrastructure. Also talking with faculty members at UF and other universities one gets a feeling that there is a tremendous increase in commercialization of universities at the expense of scholarship.

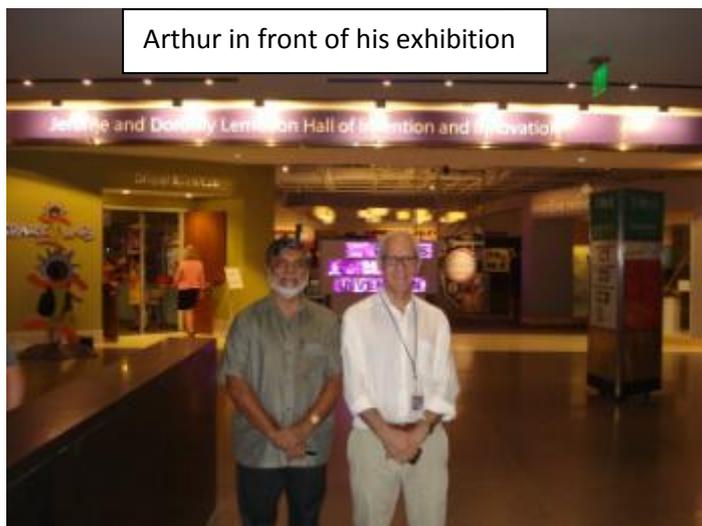
Pradeep Wahi, AKR and Pradeep Rau



13. We also visited our friends in Washington D.C. and used the occasion to catch up with my IIT Kanpur classmates. Thus in Pradeep and Anu Wahi's house, Pradeep Rau also joined us for dinner and a lovely evening.

14. A trip to Washington is not complete without a visit to the famous Smithsonian Museums. We visited our friend Dr. Arthur Molella the former Director of the National Museum of American History. He showed us his recently set up exhibition "Innovation in America" in Lemelson Hall of Invention and Innovation. One of the interesting exhibits in it was the history of hip-hop music innovation which came out of the ghettos of Brooklyn. With very limited

resources gangs of Jamaicans and Blacks produced a music revolution which has become a multi-billion dollar industry.



15. Another section in this exhibition was the Draper Spark! Lab - a children's activity room where under the supervision of Museum staff children were carrying out various activities such as making toys from logo building

blocks and from different materials etc. This section was packed and according to Dr. Mollela is the most popular place in the whole museum. As much as the children their parents seemed to be enjoying the activity!

16. Every year we see the increase in technology in everyday life of America. For example waiting for restaurants seating, you are given a small device which lights up when your name is called. This is a radio frequency-based device. Similarly in most supermarkets and malls there are self check-out counters where all your bought-out items' tags are scanned and you pay through debit or the credit card by swiping it. Generally a mall employee keeps a watch to make sure that you do not steal. In the same way in all airlines counters there are more and more self-service kiosks, so that the employment is reduced. Thus US is moving more and more toward cashless and employee-free society.



17. There is a great increase in the number of farmers' markets and organic food. Even the regular food shops in malls offer a whole plethora of organic food. Americans are very concerned about the pesticide/insecticide residues in their food and hence

the proliferation of organic food craze.

18. Similarly we observed a tremendous increase in the use of chlorine in water. Though drinking water from taps is safe, we could smell chlorine as soon as a tap was opened. This could be one of the reasons for rise in bottled water usage. One is however not sure how good is high chlorine concentration for gut flora.
19. This time we saw many more homeless people and beggars in big cities like New York and Boston. It seems that the divide between haves and have-nots is increasing and it is quite possible that in future America may be a country ripe for socialism!
20. Yet the choices for well-to-do people are enormous with supermarkets and malls full of goods. I sometimes feel that it is very difficult to be a spiritual person in U.S. with constant bombardment of advertisements for things to buy. America has always been a very materialistic society but with online buying and home delivery it is very easy to be seduced in buying more and more.
21. The US trip ended with four of us spending a wonderful day in New York where our daughter treated us to fine cuisine and the Broadway hit show “Kinky Boots”.

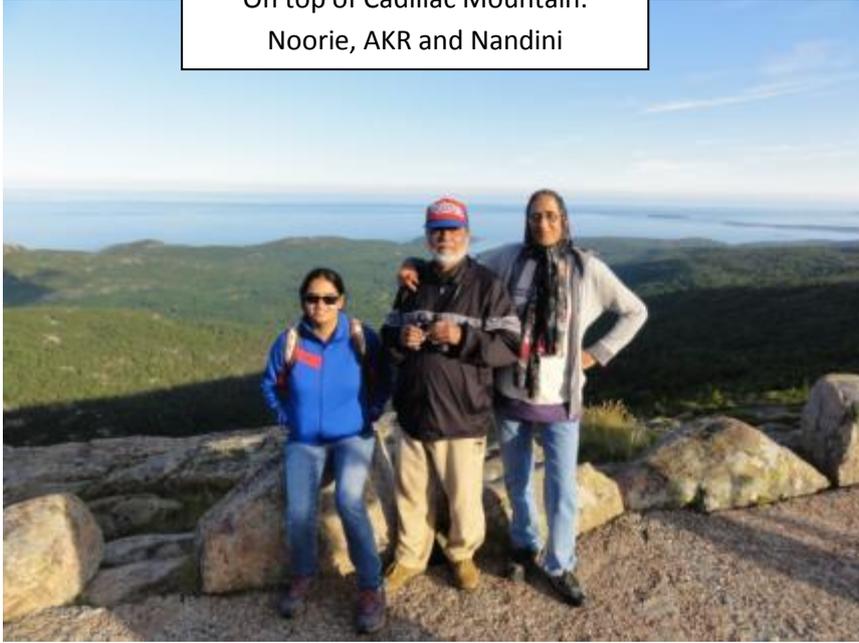
Photo montage

Seals on Lighthouse Island



Hike in Acadia

On top of Cadillac Mountain.
Noorie, AKR and Nandini



Electric bikes for hire in Boston



Sparks lab in Smithsonian



Inside theatre showing Broadway hit “Kinky Boots”.
L-R. Nandini, Noorie and Navin