

**TOUR REPORT**

**Saturday, 25<sup>th</sup> February – Saturday, 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2017**

Arriving in Las Vegas on a warm evening the weather forecast on the TV weather channel later that night, for the north part of Nevada, was looking decidedly cool – so cool, in fact, that snow was expected in Fallon!

As the tour manager was dressed for the tropics his first task was to make a stop to let him and the group buy an item of warm clothing!

On the Sunday’s drive north to Fallon we made a couple of ‘convenience’ stops en-route, one of which included a ‘first’ for Ian Allan Aviation Tours: attached to the café and shop was a fully licensed brothel.....! It was so interesting we made a second stop on the drive back south a few days later!

Monday morning and we arrived in good time at the Visitors Center/Pass Office at NAS Fallon’s main gate; the taking of personal details, copies of passports etc was a bit of a chore but if that’s what was required to get airside on a busy ramp, who’s complaining. We got a very warm welcome from the PAO who briefed us on the do’s and don’ts when on the ramp.



Shortly after 09:00 we were out on the ramp of the Naval Strike and Air Warfare Centre (NSAWC) – “Top Gun”! Dozens of F-5s, F-16s, F-18s and Super Hornets – many in fabulous ‘aggressor’ schemes - plus a couple of E-2 Hawkeyes and various helos. Soon after our arrival the decibel count on the ramp began to rise as engines started up and the next set of missions took off. But gosh was the wind cold: only eased by the hot engine exhausts of passing aircraft wafting over us.

It was soon apparent that there was no maximum speed for taxi-ing as aircraft sped across the ramp and down the long taxiway to the end of the runway. For the next 3 hours, as we criss-crossed the huge expanse of concrete, the PAO made sure that all his charges were moving in the right direction at a good pace (with all his experiences of spotters and photographers I am sure he could round up sheep no problem). Snow on the nearby mountain range made for some great photos. By midday we were done airside having got some truly great photos. Time to go to the various aircraft in the Heritage Air Park before setting out on the drive south to Tonopah. Not for the first, nor the last time, a great time was had by all airside on Fallon.



Overnight in the old 'cowboy' town of Tonopah, it just so happened that across from the hotel was the Tonopah Brewing Company brewery. Big choice of on-site brewed beers; large seats, long tables, excellent menu and man-sized meals it was a great end to a great day.



Next morning an early start as we head for Father Crowley's Overlook located atop Rainbow Canyon. After going up and down a couple of mountain ranges and crossing Death Valley we arrive at this popular location to capture the action of low flying aircraft hurtling through the Canyon and across Death Valley – this low-level flying route (LLFR) is known as the Jedi Transition (and in true Star Wars

fashion, the experience is out of this world!). Pictured here, with an incredible background, is an Eagle heading for outer space!

Within 15 minutes of our arrival we had our first aircraft to be followed by another 13 over the next 6 hours: F-15s, F-16s, F-18s and Super Hornets; plus a transiting C-17 which flew low down the Valley and a Beechcraft T-6 on a nav exercise. One F-18 pilot seeing the group as he flew through the Canyon, climbed and banked around 360 degrees and headed straight for us passing low over our heads - not once, but twice!



Like the Mach Loop LLFR in Wales, some days are better than others. That's why in November our tour will spend 2 full days here. See our website, tour 227743: bookings are coming in.

Pictured here is one of two Royal Netherland Air Force F-35s that passed before our eyes!

Purring like pussycats who ate all the cream, we boarded our coach and set off for Las Vegas taking the scenic route down Death Valley; as the sun slowly sunk below the western horizon the colours of the desert changed from white to a dark purple and the mountains shone like gold.

Arriving in 'Vegas early evening we checked into the appropriately named Stratosphere Casino, Hotel and Resort ideally located at the northern end of the famous Strip: Nellis AFB was just a 20-minutes drive down the freeway.

Taking photos at Nellis can be a pain as regular visitors know only too well. Do you go to the area adjacent the Las Vegas Speedway at the northern end of the base or the eastern end of East Cheyenne Avenue at the southern threshold?



Are aircraft taking off and/or landing to/from the north or the south - on either of the 2 runways? What they do one day can be different the next.

Nothing is simple at Nellis: aircraft can take off and land in either direction at the same time! One aircraft lands from the north and the next one lands from the south. The Speedway end is favourite for getting top shots as the aircraft bank around over the top of you if they are landing from the north. At the south end, on Cheyenne, top shots are impossible but the aircraft are only slightly above you as they turn and land on either the nearest or furthest runway.



With our local, excellent coach drivers ready to make fast transfers between Speedway and Cheyenne, over the 3 days we managed to choose the right location most of the time and in the end everyone got the photographs they wanted.

To summarize: we got what we went for; the photographers got what they paid for – in other words, this was a ‘Ronseal’ tour (does exactly what it says on the tin) with a few pleasant surprises along the way: the ‘convenience’ stop that offered more than was expected: the exhilaration of tramping around the Top Gun ramp; the indescribable, unforgettable experience of the Jedi Transition LLFR; and the incredible shots at Nellis of aircraft turning and banking around you, eyeball-to-eyeball with the pilots!



Like what you see? Everyone on this tour got hundreds, possibly thousands, of fabulous images. Do you want to take some – then book on our tour 227743: itinerary is on our website.