

The Boeing B747 Captain made a great job of landing on San Diego's short runway which is surrounded by hills and a city, an interesting start to our tour. A quick transfer to our hotel, bags dropped and off for a short walk to Old Town to sample the restaurants, cafes and bars in the historic area.

The next day we headed east towards the hot desert after a brief stop at Gillespie Field for a look around San Diego Air & Space Museum's annex with its interesting collection of aircraft. En-route to El Centro we popped into a Walmart to pick up folding chairs (essential items for sitting outside airfields) and lunch. Then to the end of runway 26 to capture some of the arrivals and rehearsals for the next day's Show.



A clear, sunny and hot day at the El Centro Air Show: highlights included the first display of the year by the Blue Angels plus an F-86 Sabre, MiG-15 as well a T-33 Shooting Star.

Today we head into Arizona via a comfort stop in a town called Gila Bend, that just happened to have not one but two McDonnell RF-101C Voodoos guarding the gate of an ex USAF Airfield! With these rare beasts photographed we continued to Tucson and one of the world's biggest and best collections of aircraft: the Pima Air Museum. We spent the afternoon looking around the hundreds of aircraft on display at this fascinating museum.



In the evening, we made our way to the Four Points Sheraton Hotel, ideally located next to Tucson Airport; this would be our home for the next four nights.

Returning to the Pima Air Museum the next morning we were welcomed by the Head of the Restoration facility who gave us our own private back-lot tour.

Next, we joined the line to board the AMARG tour bus for our first look at the 4000+ aircraft stored in the Arizona sunshine at Davis-Monthan AFB. In order to get the best photo opportunities from both sides of the coach we also took seats on the next tour as well. Some of the group spent the rest of the day revisiting the Museum, while others set off to capture some images of aircraft in the local scrap yards - as expected we could not enter the yards but got some good shots from the outside.

Very early the next morning some of the group headed off to Double Eagle Aviation, climbed aboard a Cessna 172 and set off to circle overhead AMARG and Pima at around 2000 feet. Seeing thousands of military aircraft lined up in the early morning sunshine will be a sight that stays with me for a long time. Later the intrepid aviators joined the rest of the group on the perimeter of Tucson Airport. There are over 60 F-16s based with Arizona Air National Guard, of which around 25 were active during the day. Unfortunately, the based Iraqi Air Force ones stayed firmly under the shelters all the time we were there. The slow but steady stream of airlines and biz jets and a few nice military movements kept the shutters clicking.



Another sunny day, this one spent walking along parts of AMARG's perimeter fence photographing mainly C-130, P-3, B-52 and the ex-RAF Harrier fleet. Later we spent time on the approach to Davis-Monthan watching based A-10s, C-130s and Blackhawks.



Having heard the Tucson F-16s flying night ops over the last few evenings, some of the group decided to stay at the airport till after dark, and were rewarded with around a dozen night afterburner take offs, a very impressive sight and sound.



Today we had scheduled to go to Yuma, but after discussion with the group and coach driver, we headed north to Phoenix and the very busy F-35 Lightning 2 and F-16 base of Luke.

We were rewarded with a good number of F-35s landing in front of us - including Japanese and Australian examples!

Later we started our journey south west to Yuma.

Arrivals day for the MCAS Yuma Air Show proved to be slow and hot, with temperatures in the high 90s.



At 16:00 we drove on base for the evening air show. Lots of afterburner action from aircraft and the Shockwave jet truck.

A new day – but today was billed by the local media that it would be the hottest March day ever: a great day to spend time on a hot air show apron! Still the Harriers,



Hornets, Ospreys, F-5s and F-35s on display on the ground and in the air more than made up for the heat.

With a 5-hour drive ahead of us, and the last act in the flying programme being nothing special, it was decided to leave the air show a little early.

Much later we arrived at our hotel in Ridgecrest, California only a couple of miles from the venue of the next air show.

Air show number three. NAWS China Lake NAS opened its doors for the first time in over 20 years. After passing through the very tight security we had a four-mile drive from the main gate to the show entrance and more security. Thankfully it was worth it with a line-up of all three variants of the F-35: a Dutch Air Force 'A' model, and RAF 'B' and a US Navy 'C' – the latter was a world's first at an air show. The flying was limited to a few warbirds, some aerobatics, F-18s and the Blue Angles; but the chance to see inside this famous air base and its museum - plus its collection of old test aircraft - made the journey well worth it.



The next day we headed south, stopping off at a few aircraft museums on the way.

Arriving in San Diego we headed straight for the Cabrillo National Monument with its stunning view of the very busy NAS North Island base.

All arrivals and departures could be viewed with the Seahawks flying below our vantage point.

The final night on tour was spent in the Old Town, sampling more of the Mexican-themed hospitality.

Our last morning, and some of the group took the North Harbour cruise viewing NAS North Island from the sea including its storage area, followed by the South Harbour and the huge US Navy boat yard.

Others visited the USS Midway Aircraft Carrier Museum.

During the late morning and early afternoon, we spent our time on one of the best beaches for aircraft photography: Coronado Beach, sitting at the end of NAS North Island's runway 29 where aircraft landing at the base fly along the beach.



Later in the afternoon we dusted off the sand and headed to San Diego's Charles Lindberg Airport and our waiting BA 747.

The 10-hour flight took us back to Heathrow and the end of 14 amazing days of aviation in the sunshine.

