

TOUR REPORT



Ian Allan's final Aviation Tour of the year was a trip to California and Nevada. It started with 2 days at the fabulous low level training route through Rainbow Canyon – also known as “The Jedi Transition” – and ended in Las Vegas at the 2-day Nellis AFB “Aviation Nation Air Show” over the Veterans Day weekend.

Flying from Heathrow to LAX we met up with 3 fellow aviation buffs, an American, a Brazilian a Scotsman in the Arrivals Hall, making the tour party complete. Boarding our chartered coach we set off to the little town of Lone Pine, the nearest point of civilisation to our first destination: Rainbow Canyon, which leads in to Death Valley!

Day 2: after an early breakfast we set off on the 45 minute drive east to Father Crowley's Lookout Point to photograph the jets. Large lenses aimed and poised we were ready for the first to arrive. Coming in from the left you could see the jets turning the corner and descending down in to the Canyon. Today we saw over 10 aircraft including an F-16C/D from Edwards AFB, several US Navy FA-18E/Fs and, the pick of the day, a NASA FA-18C.



Leaving as the sun went down everyone had had a great day and were looking forward to another busy day tomorrow.

The second full day at the Lookout was as sunny as the first, and to get different angles and shots, most of the group went further down the overpass to photo the aircraft just before the exit point, to get topside views looking down!



The first to come through were 2 A-10Cs Thunderbolts from the 355 BW, who made not 1 but climbed, circled and dropped down to do no less than 3 passes!. The noise of them approaching down the Canyon before eventually coming into sight has to be heard to be believed! We bumped into them again at the weekend.

Next to thunder through were 2 F-15Es, 2 F-16Cs and an F-16D. Judging by the guys reaction on the coach when returning to the hotel, these 2 days had been a great success and a return trip to the Canyon is a must.

Up early on the 4th day for a head start on the 4-hours journey south to Nellis AFB, stopping along the way to get some food/juice for our afternoon outside the airbase watching the action.

Arriving just after midday and parking up close to the speedway along Las Vegas Boulevard we enjoyed an afternoon photographing the rehearsals for the flying display, a teaser for the weekend. After checking into the Stratosphere Tower and Casino Hotel complex for 2 nights, it was time to soak up that special Vegas atmosphere.

With most of the group enjoying breakfast at the adjacent – much cheaper “Denny’s” restaurant – we were away to the airshow at Nellis for the first day of the “USAF 70th Celebrations”. All members of the public must go on and off the airbase using the 100+coach shuttle service from one of the vast car parks at the speedway circuit. Well organised, it was a painless experience.

Inviting us to walk through her into the vast static/flying aircraft area was the ever-impressive C-5 Galaxy which had been parked close to the entrance.

There were over 70 aircraft on display in the static area including most of the current USAF inventory plus US Coast Guard and US Navy types. These included: an AC-130U gunship, U-2S Dragon Lady, 3 F-16Cs, 2 F-15Es, an A-10C, F-22A, F-35A, a Reaper UAV, T-6 Texan II, T-38 Talon, C-17A, E-3G Sentry, a MH-65D Dolphin SAR helicopter and, not forgetting the mighty B-1B and B-52H heavy’s.



A real surprise was the US Navy’s CAG-Bird, EA-18G Growler of VAQ-140 (pictured right) which had flown in from the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln.



The flying display had everything from the little Van RVs aspiring to become a fighter jet, a vintage T-33 racing against a jet car, parachutists from the USAF Academy dropping from a Twin Otter (pictured left), the Texas Flying Legends with 6 of their WWII aircraft, including the MK IX Spitfire, which was fitting for the occasion.

The Nellis-based aircraft did a stunning role demo which included 2 A-10Cs, 2 F-15Cs dog fighting 2 F-16Cs from the Aggressor Squadron, 2 F-35As and 2 MH-60 Pave Hawk rescue helicopters. Even a MiL MI-24 Hind played the bad guy.

Stealing the show was the solo F-22A Raptor, before it joined up with the current USAF Heritage Flight: 2017 being the Flight’s 20th year! Led by the legendary P-51D Mustang with the 2 A-10Cs fresh from their jaunt through the Canyon earlier in the week, with a Raptor taking the slot position for the customary 3 passes finishing with a split in front of the crowd.

Closing the show on both days were the US Air Forces Thunderbirds Air Demonstration Team with 6 F-16Cs with their usual pomp and ceremony. A fantastic show as was enjoyed by all.

Sadly leaving the show at its conclusion, we got a shuttle coach back to the speedway, boarded our own coach for the transfer to Las Vegas Airport and checked in with BA for our overnight flight home. The next morning, while waiting for our luggage in Baggage Reclaim, we said farewell to each.

The group had enjoyed a successful week of aviation action and good weather thrown in to boot.

Report and all photographs courtesy of Paul Rouhan, Tour Manager, Ian Allan Aviation Tours.

NOTE: Ian Allan Aviation Tours will be attending the 2018 Thunderbirds Airshow on Nellis AFB in November; PLUS the Pensacola Naval Air Station airshow, featuring the Blue Angels, PLUS airbases, airfields, boneyards and optional sightseeing flights in Tucson, Arizona; PLUS the largest and busiest fighter base in the world: Luke AFB! See tour 227814 for details!