**Around the World in Two Weeks**

This summer, Flying Dutchman magazine invited journalist Mike Woolson and photographer Hian Oey to test the new round-the-world ticket offered by KLM and Northwest Airlines. Excerpts of their globe-trotting adventure follow.

by Mike Woolson for *KLM Airlines’ Flying Dutchman*

Sometimes I feel like I was born a few decades too late. I long to be one of the world's great explorers, but there just doesn't seem to be a whole lot of the world left to discover these days. Unless I want to kayak across the Pacific or rollerblade down Mt. Everest, it's not too likely that I'll go down in the record books as the first person to do anything. Thus, when the offer came to test the links of KLM and Northwest airlines' worldwide flight network, I saw it as a chance to make my mark as the first person to circumnavigate the globe on a single airline system. At the very least, I'd be the first person to do so and write an article about it for Flying Dutchman. My mission was to fly from Asia to three cities in the United States and two in Europe, then back to the Far East. In the process, I'd get a whirlwind, look at five of the world's best-loved vacation destinations. Our plane left Taipei early on a Saturday morning. Owing to the mysteries of the international dateline, we arrived on the U.S. West Coast eighteen hours later, but on the same Saturday morning. A free extra day! What a great way to start an adventure.

**Stop 1: San Francisco**
San Francisco must rate as one of the world's most laid-back cities. It is home to a wide range of people, attitudes and lifestyles, and it has a perennially pleasant climate to boot. It is also one of America's most recognizable cities: nowhere else will you see rows of elegant Victorian homes packed side-by-side along some of the world's steepest streets. Along the U.S. West Coast, northward from Los Angeles anyhow, San Francisco is so revered as a cultural center that it is simply called "The City."

With a robust mass transit system and ubiquitous Uber, getting around in San Francisco is fairly easy. The storied San Francisco trolley cars exist primarily for the benefit of tourists (they're a registered National Landmark). Taxis are easy to flag in business districts, less so in many of the neighborhoods. Renting a car is a practical idea if you will be venturing away from downtown, where parking is scarce and expensive.

For an unbeatable view of the city and its surroundings, have a look from the top of Twin Peaks. The caps of these two small mountains, surrounded by some of this pricey city's priciest real estate, offer a spectacular 360-degree view stretching from the San Francisco Bay to the Pacific Ocean. Accessible by car, Twin Peaks Boulevard runs off of Market Street.

Another highlight of the visit was a trip to the Cafe du Nord, at 2170 Market Street. This former speakeasy reopened several years ago and has emerged as one of the city's hottest jazz clubs. Co-owner Jon Varnedoe calls jazz "America's only cultural contribution to the world," and live performers appear nightly, playing everything from classic sounds of the 1920s to more current fare. Call (415-861-5016) to find out what's on. And if you go, take some time to wander a few blocks up to the Castro, the spiritual center of the gay rights movement.

If your legs are up to the hills, San Francisco is most definitely a walker's town. There are neighborhoods and shopping districts to suit most anyone's taste, from the city's large and colorful Chinatown to the impressive mansions of Pacific Heights to the famed Haight-Ashbury district. Also not to be missed is Golden Gate Park, which featares diversions including a botanical gardens, the DeYoung Art Museum, the Academy of Science, a Japanese Tea Garden, and a planetarium.

Fisherman's Wharf and Alcatraz Prison are San Francisco's main tourist attractions…they're interesting enough, but I found more to see on any number of walks around the city itself. If you're renting a car, the 17 Mile Drive, between Carmel and Monterey, covers some of America's nicest views and most exclusive addresses.

San Francisco's Visitor Information Center is located in Hallidie Plaza, below street level at Powell and Market (415-391-2000). The staff there can provide you with a wide range of brochures and guides, as well as information on package tours. For details on bed-and-breakfast inns, one of the city's most pleasant features for visitors, contact Bed & Breakfast International (1181-B Solano Avenue, Albany, CA 94706 or call 415-525-4569).

I could have spent a week exploring The City and enjoying the mild weather, but I had a plane to catch to:

Stop 2:

Minneapolis and St. Paul

Visitors to the American Midwest invariably comment on the vast amounts of space there. The environs of Minneapolis and St. Paul are no exception. Take a drive outside of these clean, modern cities and you'll find yourself on open roads with fields stretching as far as the eye can see. Renting a car is by far the best means of getting around.

The history of the Twin Cities is the history of the American frontier, and there are plenty of opportunities to explore. One way is to catch a ride on a Mississippi riverboat –brief narrated tours leave from Murphy's Landing. Other highlights include the century-old City Hall in Minneapolis; Indian Mounds Park, a Native American burial ground along the Mississippi; and Fort Snelling, a meticulously restored stone fortress from the 1820s.

The Twin Cities also attests to Americis love, or perhaps obsession, with size. Minneapolis holds several “World's Largest” records: Cold winters and American ingenuity have combined to create one of the Twin Cities' most interesting features: the Skyway, the biggest enclosed, aboveground pedestrian walkway on Earth, connecting some twenty-five city blocks. The shopping mall is now a quintessential part of the American. experience. One of the most spectacular recent entries on the scene is the Mall of America, off Interstate 494. With more than 400 stores, dozens of restaurants and nightclubs, and an amusement park, it ranks as America's largest. My personal favorite record-holder is Minneapolis' Sculpture Garden, also the largest of its kind. For some reason, the giant cherry-on-a-spoon fountain really sticks in your mind.

To get your bearings here, visit the Minneapolis Convention and Visitor Commission, located at 1219 Marquette Avenue (612-348-4313). The St. Paul Convention and Visitors Bureau is located on the sixth floor of the NCL Tower at 445 Minnesota Street (612-297-6985). For information on current events and shows in both cities, call The Connection (612-922-9000). Minneapolis/St. Paul provides an excellent taste of the American heartland. But there was the rest of the world to explore. So it was back to the airport, and on to:

Stop 3:

New York City

If I had to describe New York City in a word, I'd use "big." Two words: "very big." Really, the sheer scale of the Big Apple– which seems as high as it is wide– makes it a city unlike any other. Standing on any street in Manhattan gives you the feeling that you're in the center of everything. It's also eminently well-designed: the grid layout of the streets, and the fact that they are numbered, make it a snap to navigate. Driving in New York, however, ranks right behind shark wrestling on my list of hazardous sports. Renting a car is not recommended. Taxis are plentiful, and the subway is economical and often the fastest way to get around. It's a complicated network, though, so be sure of what train you want and where you need to transfer before you board.

High on New York's long list of "must do" activities for me are the museums…there are more than 150 of ‘em, covering every imaginable aspect of art, history and culture. If I had to pick one, I'd recommend the Guggenheim, on Fifth Avenue at 89th Street. Not only does it boast an outstanding collection of impressionist and modern art, but the building itself— designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, and renovated in 1991— is a work of art as well.

Another classic New York experience is catching the Staten Island Ferry from Battery Park to the Statue of Liberty. The statue, a symbol of America for the tens of thousands of immigrants who arrived at Ellis Island at the turn of the century, has been more popular than ever since its centennial. Be sure to visit the new museum built into the base of the statue. It tells the stories of more than a century of immigrants coming through Ellis Island. And the ethnic mix of the viewers joining you in the museum attests to the fact that New York is still a melting pot of widely different cultures.

A major draw for visitors and locals alike are the Broadway shows, and you can count on a good selection any time you stop by. Keep in mind that the most popular shows are generally sold out months in advance, so it pays to plan ahead. For help deciding on what show to see, you can call the Broadway Line (212-563-2929) to get information about current shows. You can purchase show tickets by phone by calling Tele-Charge (212-239-6200) or Ticketmaster (212-307-4100). Discounted same-day tickets to shows are available at the TKTS booth in Times Square.

With all this to do, I'm almost embarrassed to admit that my own favorite activity in New York is just wandering around, window-shopping and people watching. It seems like no matter where you look in Manhattan, there is something worth seeing. I'm quite partial to the southern end of Greenwich Village, leading into Soho. This area is home to dozens of excellent galleries, shops and sidewalk bistros, and has an intimate charm unmatched in the city. Take an hour or two to explore this district.

Tourism is big business in New York, and the Convention & Visitors Bureau, at 2 Columbus Circle in midtown Manhattan (212-397-8222), will be happy to provide you with materials to help you enjoy your stay. I had only had a tiny taste of the Big Apple, but it was time to leave the United States and cross the Atlantic for Europe. 7 hours later, we touched down in:

Amsterdam Stop

After the teeming metropolis of Manhattan, the intimacy of Amsterdam came as a real surprise. Each of the centuries-old gabled homes lining the ubiquitous canals is a unique work of art–there are so very many, it's hard to appreciate how grand each one is.

Amsterdam is also a very easy place to enjoy since most of the Dutch speak excellent English, though it's always appreciated if you pick up a few courtesy words of Dutch. I mastered "Dank U wel" (Thank you!) and "Hoeveel cost dot?" (How much?). Central Amsterdam is not a very big place and parking is scarce, so you're best off going by foot and public transport. Taxis are also available, though it's usually easier to phone a request than it is to try and flag one. One pleasant surprise: Bicycles are available for rent all over town, and there's really no better way to see the city at its own pace. The layout of Amsterdam has a mysterious quality–I kept getting lost among the concentric rings of streets and canals. Be careful not to get so caught up in absorbing the atmosphere that you haphazardly wander into the bicycle lanes, as I did at least a dozen times. It's a tribute to the truly tolerant nature of the Dutch that they took it all in stride. The best way to start touring Amsterdam is to take a canal tour–there seems to be a departure point every couple of blocks in the central district. I found it helpful to bring a small map with me so that I could mark spots I wanted to visit later. Among these, I was most taken with the Anne Frank Huis, at 263 Prinsengracht, where Anne and her family hid from the Nazis as she wrote the Diary. Though conversion to a tourist attraction has necessarily diminished the atmosphere, the sense of history in the place remains powerful. The Rijksmuseum features some of the finest works by the Dutch masters. Rembrandt's Night Watch seems to be the star of the show here, but the cumulative effect of the entire collection gives one a sense of the scope Dutch history. The inverse was the case at the Vincent Van Gogh museum, where hundreds of works trace the single decade Van Gogh spent painting. Viewers come away with an intimate view into the workings of one of

 history's most brilliant and troubled minds. There are tourist offices located across from Central Station, at Leidseplein/Leidsestraat, and at Stadionplein. Lines can sometimes be long, and small fees are charged for most of their publications and services. Now is an excellent time to visit Amsterdam, as observances of the Golden Age–an unparalleled period of economic and cultural growth in the seventeenth century–will be under way through next March. It was hard to leave Amsterdam, but the grand finale of my world tour was still to come:

Stop In preparation for my journey, I asked several Parisians to name one thing about the city they thought should not be missed. To my surprise, none of them could. After seeing the place, though, I understand: There is simply far too much to choose from. For me, the most striking thing about Paris is that everywhere you look, it looks just like, well, Paris. Terraced apartment buildings with Mansard roofs, massive and ornate Gothic cathedrals, sidewalk bistros and brasseries, sharply-dressed couples billing and cooing on park benches–it's all exactly as you'd expect it to be. Paris is similar to New York in terms of getting around–taxis are readily available and the Metro runs just about anywhere (but plot your route before you board.) Not speaking French may make things difficult, but certainly not impossible. Navigating in Paris can be a little tricky, as the streets do not seem to follow any master plan. Complicating matters is the fact that the French like to name streets after national heroes and, since they have so many of them, most street names change every three or four blocks. Hint: Carry a map. The Tourism Office, located a stone's throw from the Arc du

5 Paris

Triomphe (127 Avenue de Champs-Elysees), has a very helpful staff and publications in English. The English information line is (47-20-88-89). Just naming the major attractions of Paris would take more space than I have here: the Louvre, the Eiffel Tower, the Pantheon, the Musee d'Orsay...the city is home to dozens of the world's major cultural and historical landmarks, and that does not include the many colorful and historic neighborhoods. A boat tour of the Seine offers a good opportunity to sit back and take it in before you start sightseeing. An afternoon stroll in the Quartier Latin sits high on my list of pleasurable memories. Here, you can start with a look at the massive and beautiful Cathedral of Notre Dame. Then stroll across the Seine–perhaps pausing to browse at the many bookstalls lining the way, and proceed down the Boulevard St-Michel. Take time to loop up and down the small alleys off of St-Michel, where small shops of every variety await. Within a few blocks you'll come to the Pantheon, a domed memorial in Roman style, and the Church of St-Etienne-du-Mont, which features a unique blend of Gothic, Re-naissance, and Baroque architectural details. Both are absolute, one-of-a-kind treasures. By now, you're probably getting a bit hungry. Pick up a snack at any of the many eateries in the area and take it of to the Jardin du Luxembourg, where you can sit amongst the immaculate trees and fountains, and think about what a nice trip you've had. That's what I did, anyway. As I boarded the plane for Asia, I decided that if I hadn't set a first in global adventuring, I probably did in terms of sheer self-enjoyment. Now, to get over that jet lag...