

## Trip 2 – Episode #21 – And Now For Something Completely Different – Part 1

Before and during our travels, we've asked people to suggest interesting places for us to put on our itinerary. In pretty much every case, those suggestions have yielded great adventures for us.

One suggestion came from our friend Esther Pifko, who told us her daughter said we should go to Marfa, Texas. Once again, this was a place we'd never heard of, and when we read about it, we agreed it seemed like a spot worth checking out. For a variety of reasons.

Even before we got to Marfa, things started to get interesting. After a short period on the road, we saw this sign.

So we stopped and looked. If you squint, or close one eye, these mountains kind of look like Lincoln in profile.



Since seeing this, we've noticed that one could probably find profiles of all kinds of presidents and other celebrities in any number of mountain ranges.

But it was a good introduction to Marfa, which is all about keeping an open mind.

Marfa is most famous for its "mysterious lights" which regularly appear at night, at a certain spot east of town. They were first documented in 1883, and since then there have been all kinds of potential explanations, including paranormal phenomena such as ghosts, UFOs and "will-o'-the-wisps".

More recently, Marfa has become a home for "minimalist" art installations, initiated by Donald Judd, who created the Chinati Foundation. We passed by a display of his concrete installations outside of town, but I wasn't able to get a decent shot, and the Foundation which offers tours, wasn't open when we were there. So I stole this photo:



The confluence of the art installations, the "mystery lights" and other historical events has made Marfa a town with its own unique style, surprisingly eclectic architecture, quirky shops and art galleries, interesting restaurants, colourful murals, and ... other oddities.

On our way into town, we actually saw tumbleweeds blowing across the road.



When we first arrived and saw these signs, we thought we were going to be in a town that stopped growing in the 50s.



But then we saw the town centre, which was much grander than we expected.



And other interesting buildings around town.



Then there were murals, some of which were difficult to explain.



Others more traditional.



There were several interesting dining opportunities...





It's hard to tell from this shot, but this is a kind of food truck outdoor dining area. Not sure if the old auto relics were meant to provide seating.



We settled on The Water Stop which was fun. They were crazy busy and the two servers were run off their feet, so the wait was long, but the food was good.





One of the other things that puts Marfa on the map is that it has been the site of numerous motion pictures, including *No Country for Old Men* and *There will be Blood*, as well as the epic 1956 movie *Giant*, starring Elizabeth Taylor and James Dean, in his final movie.

*Giant* clearly had the most profound effect on Marfa. In its small downtown, there's a gorgeous hotel, at which the celebrities stayed, The Hotel Paisano.







In the stores, there are all kinds of Giant paraphernalia – everything except a DVD of the movie!



And if you drive a few miles west of town (which we did, of course), you get to the ranch where Giant was actually shot. You can tell pretty easily where it is from the Giant billboard murals.





Jim was inspired to do his James Dean impression. In case you're unable to tell, Jim is the one in the foreground.



More surprises and interesting sights awaited us in and around Marfa.





And this sign, which we really appreciated. Although Texas, as we know is prominently Republican, Marfa and Presidio County has voted Democrat in every presidential election this century.



Even our chosen campground, the Tumble In, had a surprise for us. It took us a while to realize that it was also a site for another art installation!



These pillars looked interesting during the day, with unusual images carved in them.



A little research revealed that the installation is called "Actual Contact," created by Jason WA Tucker. The symbols are described as "a cross between some inspired desert hieroglyphics and an imaginative space alien's technical drawing."





The big surprise came at dusk, when I went out to take photos of the sunset...



... And discovered the pillars lit up!





These were the only mysterious lights we saw in Marfa. We thought about driving out to the spot where they apparently appear, but we were tired and it was cloudy and we frankly pooped out.



We definitely could have stayed in Marfa longer, but, probably due to the pandemic, (or perhaps due to Marfa's own quirkiness) most galleries and stores were closed till Wednesday or Thursday.

So, we headed toward our next destination, which would be at least as quirky as Marfa.

But Marfa had one more surprise for us. We had forgotten about this art installation until we saw something off in the distance, in the middle of the desert.



Yup, the Marfa Prada. Because why not?

Thanks for the suggestion, Esther!