

July 21, 2010 - Sturgis and Deadwood, SD

I was informed that I had to see Sturgis at least once in my lifetime. Well, unfortunately this year's big bike rally in that "motorcycle capital" was going to take place after I started my trip back home at the end of July. So, I did the next best thing. I made a trip before things got really crazy to get a feel for this town of bikes and bikers. One of the decisions that I needed to make was just how to get there. I could fly my plane the 60 miles over to the Sturgis airport, but that would involve my having to try to rent a car once there for the 5 mile trip into town and then over to Deadwood. I also needed to get to nearby Rapid City (30 miles east) for some necessary shopping and other chores as well. So I decided on my "plan B" option of using the courtesy auto graciously loaned to me by Brian, our airport manager. This would allow me to make the 150 mile round road trip in comfort rather than with my little Vespa with its top speed of 50 mph.

Arrival into Sturgis was around noon and it was like arriving at one of the "Old West" ghost towns. It was definitely quiet... kinda like the calm before the storm quiet. While there were some bikers occasionally traveling through its main street, it was hard to fathom that in only a few more weeks the town would be full to capacity, as would many of the other adjacent communities, including my own city of Custer. There are in excess of 100,000 bikers and their "easy riders" who make this "annual pilgrimage", much like Muslims journeying to Mecca. I suspect that most motorcyclists and probably all Harley riders will get there at least once in their lifetime. I was told that the time to go is during the rally when it's "all happening". I was told that there are things going on there that I wouldn't believe, even after seeing them with my own eyes. I was told that there would be young topless and even thong wearing females on almost every bike. However, after noticing that nine out of every 10 women sitting behind their bikers seem to be plus sized senior citizens, that is something that I want to not even envision, let alone experience.

Instead I spent an hour touring around the town and going through their very interesting motorcycle museum. Upon leaving the museum, I ran across a couple who were traveling thru with their Harley and I managed to get a photo of me and my new BFF, alongside his bike.



A Sturgis welcome sign on downtown Main St.



The calm before the biker's storm - an empty street



What you want to see in Sturgis



What you are more apt to see



This sculpture looks like a typical biker mama



Me and my just found Sturgis biker "newbee"

Deadwood is just a 30 minute drive west of Sturgis. I arrived in town during mid afternoon. After a quick lunch of a bison burger and beer, complete with cowboy music at an outside bistro, it was time to tour the town. The quickest way to accomplish that task was with a one hour trolley tour which gave a historical time frame from the days of Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane (both of whom are buried in the town's "boot hill" cemetery). Bill Hickok was killed by a shot to the back while playing cards in Old Saloon #10. The shooter was immediately captured, tried and hung... all in the same day. When gold was discovered in the Black Hills in 1876, Deadwood soon became the capital city for "gold rush fever" and its population quickly grew.

In the late 1980's this small city of 1200 inhabitants was made a state sanctioned "casino city", and there are casinos literally everywhere. Every hotel, motel, restaurant, bar & saloon, convenience store and even gas stations seems to promote themselves as "casinos". However the real deals appear to be at the larger hotels, all of which have gaming halls attached. Each year in excess of \$7 million is generated from the 4% fee attached to Casino winnings and which goes directly into the town's coffers. Many of the buildings go back to the late 1880's and Main Street has several brick and masonry structures that survived the numerous fires that periodically seemed to decimated the downtown area. Jewish immigrant tradesmen had a lot to do with the success of old Deadwood by establishing businesses that would cater to both the prospectors and residents. The Chinese also had a lot to do with the growth of the town by providing ancillary services to many of those businesses. Of course the most famous visitor to the town was Gen. George A. Custer during his 1874 expedition into the Black Hills, climaxed just two years later by his fatal encounter with Sitting Bull and the combined Sioux, Lakota and Cheyenne indian nations at Little Big Horn in nearby Montana territory.

Several times each day you can attend a good old fashioned "shootout" at various locations along Main Street. Each one of these episodes recreate an actual, although highly exaggerated, reenactment of a historical fact to a crowd of tourist onlookers. While in town I was able to witness two such "gunfights". After the last one I started on my drive back to Custer, returning to my motor home as darkness began to cover the Black Hills of S.D.



View of downtown Deadwood from "boot hill"



The old historic Bullock Hotel - now a casino



The grave of Wild Bill Hickok was visited on tour



On of the daily "Shootouts" on Main Street

