

Playing bridge overseas

Chris and I recently returned from a 2-month trip to the USA and Canada. We played bridge twice while we were away, once in USA and once in Canada.

Our decision to play bridge was governed by weather forecasts or the need for a break. Finding a club hosting a face-to-face game when we wanted to play wasn't always easy. Outside the big cities the options are limited. Most clubs in regional areas are small and only play face to face one or two times a week. You need to be a bit lucky to find a club offering a face-to-face game at the time you want in the place that you want. A lot of people prefer to play online.

We thoroughly enjoyed our bridge games. The people were welcoming. We had great discussions about what it is like to play bridge in our respective countries. We received lots of helpful suggestions about things to see and places to eat in the local area.

For the most part the bridge played was identical to what we play here in Australia. Almost everybody played Standard American. Only one pair played Precision. Nobody played Acol.

There were some differences:

1. The masterpoint system is different. In Australia the number of points allocated are far fewer than in USA and Canada. One Australian masterpoint seemed to be equivalent to about six ACBL masterpoints.
2. They don't split the field into sections A and sections B as we do. All players compete against everyone but are ranked only with players at their level. The fact that the levels are set based on masterpoints and our masterpoints were different caused some confusion. In USA we were classified as beginners because we had no US masterpoints. In Canada, they ranked us as advanced players.
3. In the club we played at in USA we were not allowed to play multi twos. This wasn't an issue in Canada.
4. We used bidding boxes in both games.
5. Scoring with the bridge mates was slightly different. If declarer made one more trick than contracted, you put in "+1". One less trick was "-1".
6. In the club we played at in Canada the boards were not pre-dealt. We shuffled the boards. At the end of the first round the person with the bridge mate typed in the cards held by each player.

We can thoroughly recommend taking the time to have a game of bridge on your travels. It is fun and a great way to meet the locals. If you don't have a partner, it would be worth ringing ahead to see whether the club can find you a partner.

Don't assume you need to be an advanced player to play bridge overseas. You don't. Each of the clubs we played at had players of all standards.

Chris and Morag Lokan