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Crime Museum Offers Visitors Rare Look Inside Surveillance Van, Joins Other Overlooked Gems at Alcatraz East

Former undercover surveillance van joins museum displays

PIGEON FORGE, Tennessee (July 10, 2018) – There's a new artifact on display at Alcatraz East, but since its focus is on undercover work it might be hard to spot. The crime museum in Pigeon Forge is giving visitors a look inside the workings of law enforcement surveillance, with a van formerly used by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and a Georgia police department. Beginning July 17, 2018, visitors can see how for agents on a stakeout, spending time in the cramped quarters of a van is not nearly as glamorous as made out to be on television.

"It's not often that something like this comes along, that was actually used by federal and local law enforcement on criminal cases," says Rachael Penman, director of artifacts and exhibits. "And it has not been stripped of its equipment, giving visitors a real insider look at how it all works."

Surprising to most people is the close quarters for the agents to work. In fact, the van doesn't even allow the undercover officers enough room to stand up straight. It also offers little privacy using the toilet inside. Officers could monitor suspects from four different camera angles, and would often spend hours in the tight space during a stakeout.

According to Lilburn, Georgia Police Chief Bruce Hedley, the van was used for several years in active criminal investigations, including drug crimes and burglary stake outs,

such as in a neighborhood where there was a rash of car break-ins. From the Getaway Cars Gallery in the museum, guests will be able to see the camera perspective of a detective on a stakeout inside the van, viewing in real time as visitors come and go from the museum.

“I am very proud that the public can look at a very important piece of law enforcement equipment that we used to keep our community safe,” says Chief Hedley.

The surveillance van is not the only artifact in the museum that hides interesting details unseen from the public. The car belonging to the bank robber John Dillinger was involved in a shootout, and although the car was restored by a later owner, they kept one of the bullets visible, but only from inside of the car.

In the over twenty galleries in Alcatraz East, it can be easy to miss some of the most fascinating details of the hundreds of artifacts on view. For instance, the initial “ZT” carved in the brass railgun in the Pirates Gallery or the handwritten notes on the side of the Unabomber’s scale about its calibration. In the Mob Gallery hidden behind Mickey Cohen’s custom suit is his shirt, embroidered with his name. On the end of the sniper rifle used by the University of Texas Sniper are small numbers on a piece of tape, settings for the scope. There are other examples of objects that were designed to be hidden, like the dye pack inside a stack of \$20 bills to ward against bank robberies.

Also going on display this week are the winners of Alcatraz East’s Graffiti Art Contest on June 2nd. First, second, and third place winners can now be seen on display, that is, if you’re paying attention. “The exhibit is a bit off the normal museum tour,” says Penman, “a reflection of where you often are when you see graffiti in real life, in alleys, abandon lots, by train tracks and other neglected spaces. We thought it was fitting to maximize our limited space and beautify our own “alleys.”

The museum is always adding to their collection and has a star-studded panel of experts who make up the Advisory Board, including those in law enforcement,

collectors, a medical examiner, crime scene investigators, and others. The board includes Jim Willett, a retired prison warden, Anthony Rivera, a combat veteran and Navy SEAL chief, and Judge Belvin Perry, Jr., who is best known for the Casey Anthony trial. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit: www.alcatrazeast.com.

About Alcatraz East

Alcatraz East is the most arresting crime museum in the United States. Guests of all ages can encounter a unique journey into the history of American crime, crime solving, and our justice system. Through interactive exhibits and original artifacts, Alcatraz East is an entertaining and educational experience for all ages - so much fun it's a crime! This family attraction is located at the entrance of The Island, located at 2757 Parkway, Pigeon Forge, TN. General admission tickets are \$14.95 for children, \$24.95 for adults. Group ticket sales are available. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., with the last ticket sold 60 minutes before closing. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit: www.alcatrazeast.com.

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