

Meandering through the Midwest on a baseball road trip

By Brendan Rubin The Suburban

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What's it like to experience hometown baseball? Too long ago for someone my age to experience, yet too recent for the pain to have faded. I found a solution. It started like most good ideas, with a half-serious text: "What if we rented an RV and did a Midwest ballpark tour?" A couple of months later (and some controversy about crossing the border), my father, Lorne, his best friend, Dale, and I were packing up for the trip of a

lifetime. Five games. Four Cities. One RV. A rolling, even chaotic at times, love letter to baseball. Somewhere between the innings and the highway miles, there may have been a glimpse into what Montreal could look like if Major League Baseball ever returned.

Let me say this upfront: the RV is not for the faint of heart. It's tight. Personal space doesn't exist. You'll bump your head every time you wake up, and at one point, the ladder to the top bunk fell on my face. However, there's something about life on the road. No airports, no check-ins, just miles of open road, small-town diners, and a shared playlist swinging from Springsteen to Dylan and Wang Chung.

The trip began in Chicago's north side. Walking into Wrigleyville feels like stepping into a living, breathing history book, one that has been carefully modernized without losing its soul. The stadium rises out of the neighbourhood as if it's been there forever because, well, it has!

The scene outside was electric: patios were packed, bars were buzzing, and vendors were selling peanuts and T-shirts despite the scolding-hot weather. You look up, and the rooftops beyond the outfield are already filling with fans ready to watch the game from a view unlike any other in baseball. A Chicago dog in hand, the ivy walls and the hand-operated scoreboard right in front of you, it feels like stepping into a postcard.

Then came the home-run madness. Nine home runs leaving the yard as if the wind was pushing anything and everything out. It is the "Windy City" after all. The crowd exploded after every crack of the bat. Although the Cubs failed to secure the win, the party continued. The Chicago School of Rock band set up right outside the main gate, pumping out classic rock to hundreds of fans who had no intentions of going home yet. Baseball was, without a doubt, the main event, but it was clear that Wrigleyville itself was a cornerstone of the experience.

The next morning, we got ready to make our way to Rate Field on the South Side of Chicago: the same city, but with a wildly different vibe.

To its credit, the stadium is functional. It's easy to reach and navigate, but stepping outside the gates, the energy... disappears. There's no bustling neighbourhood, no street performers, no rooftop bars. You're either inside the ballpark or you're not. The contrast with Wrigley was impossible to ignore. The same sport, the same city, but a completely different experience.

After picking up our RV, we pointed south towards St. Louis, driving past endless fields, tiny towns, and countless rest stops. During the five-hour journey, the exhaustion of RV life started to set in. Falling out of bed during naps, jabbing elbows while reaching for snacks, we felt it all. But when the Arch came into view on the horizon, a new energy took over the van.

Busch Stadium sits at street level, like it's been gently placed into the city, rather than on top of it. It was magical to put it lightly. From our seats behind home plate, the Gateway Arch towered perfectly over the outfield. A symbol of a bright future and a strong past. It's the kind of view that makes you pause mid-inning to take it all in.

The stadium buzzed with energy but also felt incredibly welcoming. Delicious food and fun concessions lined the concourses, and the atmosphere was perfectly balanced with big-league excitement and small-town friendliness. Then came the win and with it, fireworks over the Arch. It felt like a scene straight from a movie.

Despite the heat, fans filled the ballpark village after the game. On the ground, you can find references to their old stadium, with markings indicating the locations of the third-base foul line and outfield fence. Not only was it immersive, but it also guided you to the Arch, lit up at night.

Next stop: Kansas City. In complete honesty, we had no idea what to expect.

After a delicious meal at Joe's famous BBQ and a sore nose from the falling ladder, we made our way to Kauffman Stadium, which is far from downtown, surrounded by a sea of parking and Arrowhead Stadium. At first glance, it felt empty. But after opening our

doors, the grills fired up. Tailgates popped open. People waved, offered us ribs, beers, and conversation like we were long-lost friends.

Inside, Kauffman was the biggest surprise of the trip. The fountains placed beyond the outfield are stunning, even giving a nice mist to fans. They were constantly flowing, giving the park a peaceful backdrop. Past the fountains, kids raced around a mini baseball diamond and took turns in the pitching cages, because this stadium was built with families in mind.

Even merchandise was surprisingly affordable, walking away with premium gear for a fraction of what you'd pay in other ballparks. Again, family friendly! It's the kind of spectacle that sneaks up on you. No skyline, no bars. Just baseball, barbecue, and a community of fans making the best of it.

By the time we returned the RV in Chicago, we decided to add a last game to our trip. A Friday night White Sox game against the roaring San Francisco Giants. To our surprise, we attended a game that had a post-game concert from Flo Rida! A special addition to a solid stadium. But much like the first visit, the vibe starts and ends at the gate.

As someone too young to have experienced a baseball team in my city, I wasn't sure what to expect. On our flight back, I was able to reflect on how this trip had made me feel, as it was my first time experiencing it.

The bumps, bruises and laughter all blended. This wasn't just a baseball trip; it was a window into what makes ballparks more than just a place to watch a game. It was a place to connect, to build memories, and to fall in love with the sport once more.

Some are woven into the fabric of a city, pulsing with energy before the first pitch and long after the final out. Others stand alone, where fans bring the energy themselves through tailgates and traditions. Some lean on history, some on spectacle, and some on community.

The whole trip left me wondering if baseball ever returned to Montreal: what kind of experience do we want? Is it the bustling neighbourhood energy of Chicago? The postcard beauty of St. Louis? The family first, tailgate-filled charm of Kansas City? Or something crafted entirely of our own, unique city?

If there's one thing this trip taught me, it's this: I want a place to build these types of memories at home. We shouldn't have to travel to the Midwest in a cramped RV to experience the romantic game of baseball, like we used to. Hopefully, Montreal will continue to make those memories again for friends, families, and strangers. In 20 years, if we have a team again, make the trip! It was one of the best times I've had, sharing incredible times with my father. n