

Dear Andrea Aiello

I am from Cambridge, UK, and this summer visited the Bay Area for a month with my partner and two daughters aged 4 and 7. I took them to the Castro District on a visit to show them about the history of the area and to teach them about the struggle for LGBTQ rights that the area is so famous for.

I honestly wasn't sure what to expect or whether what little knowledge I have of the Castro (based mostly on my encyclopaedic knowledge of Armistead Maupin's works and watching the film Harvey Milk!) would be up to the job of ad libbing my own tour (I'd looked online and found nothing aimed at families with children wanting to do a walking tour of the area).

We were really, really impressed by the fantastic welcome we got from the Castro Ambassadors, and from others too. In particular an Ambassador called Harry Breau or Breaux (I think) was excellent when we first arrived as was a man called (again, I'm not quite sure) Howard at the main info kiosk. A man who either runs or works at the Harvey Milk Human Rights Campaign shop was also very encouraging and actually chased us down the street with a map! We felt totally welcomed (even more so than in the rest of friendly California). I gathered from conversations that we were a bit of an unusual sight - a family with small children deliberately doing a tour of the Castro - but I wanted to tell others that the environment is perfect for an educational and meaningful family visit which could add so much to your children's views of themselves and others as they are growing up. I wanted to thank the Ambassador Team for their great maps, the perfect suggestions and the way they were able to adjust their 'usual' suggestions to accommodate small children. I would be very grateful if you could pass this message of thanks on to them.

I found the way I was able to talk with my children about LGBTQ history and also current campaigns was extremely positively impacted by actually being in the Castro and having the resources from the Ambassadors to hand. Having gay heroes being publicly celebrated was extremely meaningful. We had a brilliant time and the children have been talking about our visit often since. In craft activities they have spontaneously made rainbow themed pictures or other items, telling me about the connection with their Castro tour, I've overheard one of them putting a friend right about the legality of gay marriage and we've had a lot of 'big' discussions resulting from our visit to the part of the AIDS Memorial Quilt displayed in Catch on Market.

Thanks again, and warmest wishes,

Elisabeth