



Expedition: Europe

CONDITION

17 Jan 03 - 25 Jan 03



RICHARD G RUSSO



Expedition: Europe

LONDON

17 Jan 03 - 25 Jan 03

"'Expedition: Europe | London' -- Reflections of Life" is a journal depicting real-life events. Names, places, and events are real and have not been fabricated.



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Expedition: Europe

London, UK



“An American in London”

SA+URDAY, JANUARY 18+H

“Mind the Gap... Mind the Gap... Mind the Gap...”

With my backpack on my back, I threw my suitcase across the gap between the platform and the train, minding that gap as the recorded message advised, and joined the pack inside said car just before the doors swooshed shut and the train sped off to its next destination – Liverpool Station. I cleared the sweat that had accumulated on my brow from the effort, wiping it off with a sleeve, and let out a deep sigh of relief. It had been a long journey from the airport to the Underground but I was finally there – an American in London indeed! Right now I’m sitting in one of the studio suites of the Great Eastern Hotel, rested and in good spirits, waiting for my two travel partners to make their appearance. They are Cedric Pansky, a good friend from Denver, Colorado and Maya Abrams, a mutual long-time friend from Southern California.

How I got to London and why I am here is a bit of a story but let's not rush things. I'm still trying to get my bearings.

First, and I have to be honest; I am extremely excited to be here. This trip, or dare I say expedition, I have just embarked upon from the United States to the United Kingdom here is both a culmination of one journey and the start of another grand adventure: a cross-roads to the conclusion of my “Grand Tour” of Cirque du Soleil shows – by the conclusion of my time here in London I will have seen all currently performing Cirque du Soleil spectacles throughout the world – and the springboard for an amazing voyage across an unknown land, as London is only the beginning of Expedition: Europe, a grand dream of seeing the world. As such this excursion is filled with many firsts: the first Trans-Atlantic flight I’ve ever taken and thus the first time I’ve stepped off the North American continent, my home. Naturally, it flows then, that it’s my first time in Europe.

How exciting is that?!

Daunting too; but at the moment it’s pleasing to have a few minutes to rest the nerves and charge up the batteries. No, I mean that literally. I drained them on the flight over – laptops, so needy! – so I’ve been in desperate need of an outlet all morning. Perplexity ensued when I finally came across one – and boy the plugs here are... strange. At various points along the baseboard here are these three-pronged monstrosities, whose rectangular spikes form some kind of triangle.



What is this?! I came prepared though – thank goodness for the plug adaptors and voltage converters. Imagine what the laptop would have done with 240 volts running through it – *Zzzzzzzzap!* (As a comparison, the United States runs on 120 volts). Rest assured now everything can be charged up without worry. Take one stress point away.

Oh look; one of those red double-decker busses is going by! Meep-Meep!

Getting here proved to be quite the adventure.

You know, catching the Atlantic coastline of the United States in electric light does rate as something everyone should see at least once in his or her life. One moment there were towns and cities interconnected along thin routes of light and then... nothing; total blackness. Everything consumed by the darkness of the water. By then all I wanted was to be consumed by the darkness of my eyelids, which proved to be harder than I had imagined. I did at least try, but it's hard to sleep in "economy class". I'm not a contortionist after all! Salvation came about 7:30am London Time when a nice meal was served: a warm croissant with a banana, bread, crackers, orange juice, a fruit bar, and preserves. I completed the ensemble with a spot of tea. Well, two spots actually, but who's counting.

Before long I was on the ground at Gatwick, awaiting the start of the next adventure – immigration, customs, and baggage claim. In order to begin, however, I had to first get to the terminal, which was quite the affair here at Gatwick. Check this out: it seems most incoming flights to Gatwick have the plane pull into what I can only dub a "parking spot" out in the middle of the tarmac. Passengers depart by walking off the plane the old fashion way – down a mobile flight of stairs. Once on the tarmac (that cold, windy tarmac), passengers are ushered onto a bus and shuttled to the main terminal where customs, immigration, and baggage claim are located. From there you go your merry way; quite the ordeal just to arrive, wouldn't you say?

I was all set with everything I needed to get myself quickly and painlessly through immigration, but wouldn't you know I had to get an arrogant Brit? One who was just hell-bent on making someone's life miserable? Indeed. He questioned everything and had rude remarks for every answer I provided. ("You put none here for an address, what are you just going to stay at the airport?" – I'm sorry I didn't have the address of the hotel I was staying at!) If it weren't for the fact that there were signs everywhere stating that hitting an immigration officer landed you in hot water (geez, it's no wonder they have those signs... they *are* irritating!) I would have done it – he was that irritating and rude. But after showing the information he needed, my passport was stamped and I entered the country – finally.

I collected my belongings in baggage claim after; from there I exchanged a little US currency into British pounds (balking at the roughly £1:\$2 exchange rate, but what can you do?) and booked passage on the Gatwick Express (a special 27 mile / 30-minute train ride from the airport for £11.00 one-way) to Victoria Station, a hub of rail, Tube and

coach – pocketing the rest. Called the Pound Sterling— hold on, there’s a knock at my door.

Sorry about that, the concierge staff of the hotel came by to drop off my room keys (and a complimentary bottle of water – thanks, I’m parched!) I’ll tell you about the reasons why in a few. We’re not at that part of the story yet...

Called the “Pound Sterling”, although in practice just referred to as the Pound (denoted £ or GBP), it is a much more valuable currency than legal tender issued in the United States (or, as I understand the Euro, which we’ll experience later on in the trip). Even so, familiar and not-so-familiar denominations of coin and paper exist in a wide variety of shapes, sizes and colors. Coins are found in denominations of 1, 2, 5 10, 20, and 50 cents (called penny and/or pence – although subject to slang, such as “tuppence” for 2 pence coin – and denoted with a ‘p’), and £1 and £2 pound coins (sometimes referred to as “quid” – perhaps as a derivative of “quid pro quo”, a Latin phrase meaning “something from something”). Banknotes in general circulation come in denominations of £5, £10, £20 and £50, although higher denominations are available.

Where’s the Pounds, Shillings and Pence? They exist only in the history books I’m sorry to say. Although probably only interesting to a novice numismatic such as myself (a numismatist is a person who studies or collects coins and currency), prior to pegging the pound to 100 pence in 1971 – a process called “decimilization” – Britain used that older monetary system. The smallest unit was the Penny, the plural of which was the Pence. There were 12 pence in a Shilling and 20 Shillings in a Pound, which came in two forms: the bill was known as a “note” and the coin as a “sovereign.” Other denominations of this historical series include: the “Farthing” worth ¼ of a penny, a “Florin” worth two shillings, and a “Crown”, worth five shillings, or ¼ of a pound. So while you’ll hear these used in pirate movies and other period films (such as Sherlock Holmes, which conveniently lives at 221B Baker right here in London), you won’t find them on the streets anymore.

The designs on the coins are quite fascinating, too. The obverse (front) features a right-facing effigy of Queen Elizabeth II (on all coins), with various reverse (back) designs. On the penny (left), the badge of the Houses of Parliament are displayed, which is a crowned portcullis with chains; on the 2p, the Prince of Wales’s ostrich feathers with coronet; on the 5p, the Badge of Scotland, a thistle royally crowned; on the 10p, a crowned lion; on the 20p, a crowned Tudor rose, a traditional emblem; on the 50p, a statue representing Britannia and a lion; on the £1, the possibility of four different designs exist, highlighting the national symbols of the four constituent countries of the United Kingdom: England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. As such you might find Lion Rampant (Scotland), Welsh Dragon (Wales), the Celtic cross (Ireland), or Three Lions (England). [Notice the Dragon in the picture]. The £2 features an abstract design that I’m not quite sure about, but it is different, and reminds me somewhat of the “townies” of Canadian currency fare.



Another interesting thing of note; one of the £1 coins I received at the airport has a motto inscribed into the side milling: DECUS ET TUTAMEN, which I've found is Latin for "An ornament and a safeguard" – a phrase lifted from "The Aeneid". A quick search online turned up two other mottos imprinted on the coins depending on the reverse image they are depicting. There's PLEIDIOL WYF I'M GWLAD, "True am I to my country" from the Welsh national anthem; and NEMO ME IMPUNE LACESSIT, from the Latin meaning "No-one provokes me with impunity", which comes from the motto of the Order to the Thistle and appears on the Scottish-themed coin designs. Although discussing coins and currency can be a dry subject, I find exploring and understanding legal tender from various countries to be quite interesting. In fact I'm really looking forward to getting my hands on the Euro, which I understand has different reverse designs depending on the country you're in – so collecting them should be quite fun!







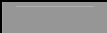
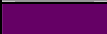
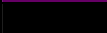



Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.

Ahhhhhhh.

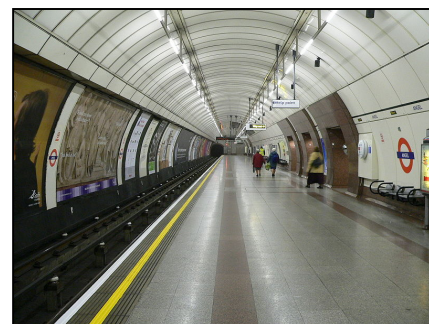
While getting to know the British system of currency and its immediate use was a daunting task (and important too), traversing its network of subway lines was equally intimidating. Considered to be the oldest underground subway system in the world (and, obviously also then the first), the London Underground is awash with over 140 years of history. As such the Underground has grown out of a tangle of labyrinthine tubes dug out and constructed by at least a dozen independent companies and railroads beginning in 1863, each with their own agenda and fierce competitiveness. As the years passed, more and more companies bought into the transportation dream in London, digging ever deeper in creation of their own fanciful routes and stations. Believe it or not, it's the shape of these deep-bore tunnels that gave way to the Underground's nickname: "the Tube". By 1933, however, the growing network from these competitive companies grew to not only be inefficient but cause substantial inconvenience to the system's customers; therefore, the railroads were merged into one network – London Transport – reorganizing them into most of the lines we see today.

Naturally there's much, much more to learn about the history of the Underground, including the rolling stock, track information, update histories, how each line got its name and so forth. There's actually an entire museum dedicated to the subject – the London Transport Museum – located in a section of the city known as Covent Garden, which I hope to visit before I leave to learn more on the subject. I find the whole history of the network to be fascinating. As I've said in the past, when you've come from a city with little to no public transportation and are then thrust into it, the mundane becomes enthralling, captivating and mesmerizing! The chart below details the lines that are in operation today, which we'll be using as the days go by: Color denotes the line's color on the maps, # denotes the number of stations serviced on the line, Line Name denotes the line's given name, Year denotes the first year the line was operating, and Length denotes the total track length of the line.



Color	#	Line Name	Year	Length
	25	Bakerloo	1906	23.2 km 14.5 mi
	49	Central	1900	74 km 46 mi
	27	Circle	1884	22.5 km 14 mi
	60	District	1868	64 km 40 mi
	8	East London	1869	7.4 km 4.6 mi
	29	Hammersmith & City	1988	26.5 km 16.5 mi
	27	Jubilee	1979	36.2 km 22.5 mi
	34	Metropolitan	1863	66.7 km 41.5 mi
	50	Northern	1890	58 km 36 mi
	53	Piccadilly	1906	71 km 44.3 mi
	16	Victoria	1968	21 km 13.25 mi
	2	Waterloo & City	1898	2.5 km 1.5 mi

Now abreast of the various lines and their destinations, thanks to a small brochure I picked up before boarding the Gatwick Express, the question then became: which one of these lines traverses through Victoria and in what direction do I travel? Studying the map on the back of the brochure provided me with three answers: the Circle Line (denoted Yellow), the District Line (denoted Green), or the Victoria Line (denoted Light Blue). Okay, fair enough. Now which one of these lines took me to my destination? The Great Eastern Hotel is on Liverpool Street, conveniently seated right across the street from the Underground outlet bearing the same name. I could take any of the lines from Victoria and connect with Liverpool, but since some of them required a change of train (and it was my first ride), I thought it wise to chose the Circle Line, aptly named because it rides in a big circle around downtown London.





The Circle Line is in what is considered Zone 1, a fare-zone setup by the Underground Authority to determine the price of a ride from what I understand. Using a specific inter-modal travel ticket, one could ride the Underground an unlimited number of times per day but only in specific zones. All of London appears to be divided into these zones – there are six (6) in all, each with a price differential. Therefore, travel within Zone 1 is a specific fare class, but should a rider wish to traverse

to another zone (say from Zone 1 to 2) a different fare class becomes in effect, as is from Zone 2 to 3, and so on. According to the map, Zone 1 is where all the base tourist attractions and locations are – not to mention where my hotel is situated – so it doesn't appear we'll need anything more than a Zone 1 or 2 card, so that's a relief. Purchasing the needed fare (a 2-day Weekend Zone 1 & 2 card for £6.10), I grabbed the ticket and made my way down to the platform.

So, with my backpack on my back I threw my suitcase across the gap between the platform and the train, minding that gap as the recorded message advised, and joined the pack inside said car just before the doors swooshed shut and the train sped off to its next destination – Liverpool Station. I cleared the sweat from my brow then (whoa, déjà vu!), wiping it off with my sleeve, and let out a deep sigh of relief. In just a few more minutes I would arrive at my destination, could check-in, shed these bags and gather up my battered nerves for a little rest. It took only a few stops for me to realize that I was on the wrong train however; the District Line (marked in Green) rather than the Circle Line (marked in Yellow). But, I didn't panic or get nervous, I just studied the map a little more closely and found a stop that I could get off at that would take me to my destination.

Unfortunately, in the process I learned that the Circle-Line was not running so I couldn't transfer to it and thus I needed to pick a new line. Thankfully, one of the next stops was a station called Monument, which is a massive complex that connects no less than 5 Tube Lines and what is called the Docklands Light Railway. After a hefty walk through the tunnels and platforms of Monument to one called Bank, I ended up at the Central Line (marked in Red). Central is also aptly named, as it runs straight through the center of London (east to west).

Not long thereafter I arrived at Liverpool St. Station, my destination, and my ordeal was over. But if you thought that you'd be mistaken. You see, Liverpool St. Station is also a major railway station, connecting four Underground routes (Circle, Metropolitan, Hammersmith & City, and Central) with the Great Eastern and West Anglia Main Lines of the National Rail and a few others from the Docklands Light Railway – according to the signs present. The station is MASIVE and trying to find my way out of it was like trying to find a needle in a haystack. Evidentially I found one eventually, but not after looking foolish wheeling my bag from one end of the station building to the other, then back again, then back yet again just trying to find the “way out”.

What I walked out on was a busy London street, but to make a long story short it took a few minutes of walking one direction, then turning back and walking the other (crossing in front of the station) in order to find the hotel. Upon arrival I began the check-in process but unfortunately their computers were down so it meant they had to find one via paper. The first room they took me too was on the fifth floor (#507) but it had not yet been serviced. After going back down to the lobby to check again, they upgraded me for the trouble and found me this nice studio room on the second floor (#220). All this, of course, is why concierge had to bring up keys for me. The staff insisted I shouldn't bother to come down as they would more than happily bring them to me once the system was up and running. It's quite nice too. The room comes complete with a King size bed, a comfy couch, a nice-sized desk, a quaint little TV, an enormous bathroom and a refrigerator full of goodies. Not bad for just an overnight, no?

So, now I sit and wait for Cedric and Maya to come in—

Oh, the “telly”! It's Cedric and Maya – they're in the lobby! They're on their way up!

Expedition: Europe

London, UK



“To the Rosedene”

SUNDAY, JANUARY 19TH

Check out our new address in London! We're just getting back in for the evening after our first real full day here, and it's already been a big one. As soon as we get settled I'll continue.

119 Ebury Street, Victoria
Westminster, SW1W 9QU
London

All right, there.

As I said it's already been a right full day here in London, taking our explorations well beyond the boundaries of Bishop's Gate – the general location of the Great Eastern Hotel. Our day started out the moment my travel-mates stirred, opened the hotel's curtains and began conversing with one another – seemingly picking up where our previous night's rumpus around the hotel left off.

Although nothing much in the way of excitement to tell, after taking in a meal from a Pizza Express – a rather upscale pizza eatery – from across the street last night, we returned to the GEH with more time on our hands than we knew what to do with. At first blush we thought about tackling the Underground to Piccadilly Circus or some-such location, but in the end we sought only to get our bearings, adapt to the time zone (which is +6 hours from Eastern Time) and acquaint ourselves with what being in London was all about. Therefore, we explored our hotel from top to bottom – running around the halls and finding various stairwells and deserted enclaves of tables and chairs from which to sit and converse in seclusion. Maya was so excited to be in London she even took up doing cartwheels down the hallways!



We did make it out for some chocolate goodies though... Did you know you can get Cadbury chocolate eggs here regardless of the time of year? They are my absolute favorite chocolate candies (well, perhaps Peanut M&Ms are my... or Snickers bars... yeah, no, Kit-Kats? Hmm, well, I guess it's hard to select just one – suffice it to say Cadbury Eggs rate highly on my chocolate list), and being able to have a bite of one even though it's not the right season for them is truly heaven indeed. It hit that sweet spot craving I had all night long. That and the Galaxy bar I also purchased. I guess we residents of the United States are only blessed with the Cadbury Eggs during the Easter holidays (the resemblance isn't hard to see) but here, in their homeland, the natives can have them whenever they want!

In either case, once I got the idea it was time to rise and shine, I grabbed a quick shower, dressed, and started about my activities.

The shower at the GEH is one of the more unique ones I've ever set foot in, I must say. There doesn't appear to be a traditional route for the water to drain as we know it; here it's more of a plastic square apparatus situated in the middle of the stall. Furthermore, the water doesn't flow away freely like it naturally would elsewhere; here it's simply sucked out every 15 to 20 seconds or so – it's very unnerving. I thought I'd catch my toes in the apparatus more than once – no lie! And if that wasn't unsettling enough, the water pressure sprayed from the nozzle alone was enough to rip off anyone's hide, and that's on the lower settings. I've heard of hard water before but this was ridiculous – the pressure was so high it physically hurt to take that shower. I guess the upside to it all was that there could be no doubts about our cleanliness.

While I was experimenting with the shower, Cedric and Maya dressed quickly and went down for some breakfast. They picked up an assortment of juices and some scones for us to munch on while we discussed some hostel opportunities – the first order of business. It really didn't take all that long to find one via the phone book, surprisingly – the Rosedene Hotel, on Ebury Street. It is 16 pounds a night, each, and there's room for us – what a bargain! Once my travel-mates cleaned up we hopped the Tube to Victoria station, the closest one, and brought along our wares. It was hellish hauling around my suitcase again, but I felt for Cedric and Maya whose bags did not roll like mine, so their burdens had to be carried upon their backs. Although I must say that arrangement works well on the staircases but not so much otherwise. At least I can wheel mine around whenever we're not ascending or descending staircases.

Alas it was a bit of a walk from Victoria station to the front door to our new home. It's not located right outside the Tube station, so we had to ask for directions and, naturally, the right ones were not given to us. But we found it. Moments later we checked in, sat our bags down, I pulled things out of my daypack and once again we were back on the streets of London.

Where to? Piccadilly Circus!

Piccadilly Circus

CIRCUS -- 1a) a large arena enclosed by tiers of seats on three or all four sides and used especially for sports or spectacles (as athletic contests, exhibitions of horsemanship, or in ancient times chariot racing) 1b) a public spectacle. 2a) an arena often covered by a tent and used for variety shows usually including feats of physical skill, wild animal acts, and performances by clowns. 2b) something suggestive of a circus, such as in frenzied activity, sensationalism, theatricality, or razzle-dazzle. 3) British: a usually circular area at an intersection of streets.

There are a number of ways to define the term “circus”, but of course the one we’re most interested in here is the 3rd iteration of the definition – a circular area at an intersection of a number of streets. And Piccadilly Circus definitely fits that bill! I’ve learned that it was built in 1819 to connect Regent Street with the major shopping street of Piccadilly, but it now directly links



Shaftesbury Avenue, Haymarket, Coventry Street and Glasshouse Street. And although a major thoroughfare-connection for a jumble of roadways, the Circus is also home to major shopping and entertainment districts that fan off in all directions forthwith. At the center lies an area particularly known for its video displays and neon signs the likes of which you’d find in Times Square in New York City (with signs for: Coca-Cola, TDK, Sanyo, McDonalds and Samsung).
Wow, what a place!

The moment you come above ground you’ll run right into the Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain, which according to its plaque was erected in 1893 to commemorate the philanthropic works of Lord Shaftesbury, for which it’s named. Atop the fountain is a figure of an archer, commonly referred to as “The Angel of Christian Charity” but popularly known as Eros, after the mythical Greek god of love. It has become an iconic symbol of post-war London they say. As such it is used as the symbol of the *Evening Standard*, a tabloid in daily circulation. Look further afield and you’ll find the many buildings that surround this round-about, and the various advertisement billboards affixed to each. Around those are a variety of famous buildings and retailers, such as the Criterion Theatre (a West End performance studio currently housing the “Reduced Shakespeare Company”), the London Pavilion (a uniquely dressed shopping arcade), Lillywhites (a sporting goods retailer), and much, much more!

We took to the main thoroughfare, partially sight-seeing and partially scoping out a great place to grab lunch. Since our stomachs were leading the charge through at this hour, we agreed that Piccadilly Circus was a destination we’d have to return to again in the near future – there was so much to see and do! We passed by a lot of nifty stores too – an HMV Store (which was interesting considering I thought they were a Canadian retailer), a Virgin Megastore (probably the only TRUE Virgin Megastore, right?), and other shops (mainly American chains, but some other interesting British stuff). One of the places that caught our attention right off was the Odeon Cinema, with its marquee casting out into the drizzly haze. With it currently screening *Lord of the Rings: Two Towers*, a film the three of us wish to see again, we might find ourselves returning some afternoon; they’re also playing *Harry Potter: Chamber of Secrets* so there are a couple of interesting options. Who wouldn’t want to catch a Harry Potter film in London, yeah?

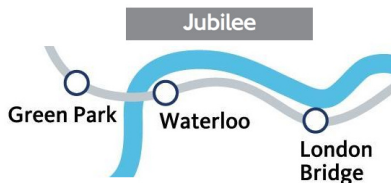
And you won't believe where we ended up for lunch – Rainforest Café!



Of all the places to dine around Piccadilly Circus, we should choose an American specialty chain. You know, though, it was one of the most bizarre Rainforest Café's I have ever seen, but definitely one of the coolest. As a patron of Rainforest Café's in Orlando (both at Disney's Animal Kingdom park but most frequently at Downtown Disney Marketplace), I'm familiar with the motif: a rainforest-themed restaurant that includes plants, mist, waterfalls, an aquarium or two, a starry sky, and

animatronic animals ready to hoot and holler at the sound of thunder (which is often in a natural rainforest, you know). Some of the café's are built into interesting buildings – the one at Downtown Disney is a volcano whereas the one at Animal Kingdom Park is a huge waterfall. Others are more mundane on the outside, shoehorned into established buildings, like the one here in London. The difference? It's three or four stories and goes straight down, not up! The menu was also slightly modified from its American counterpart, much for the better. And our waitress, though we hardly saw her, will probably be a hot topic of discussion for the remainder of our time here: she was wearing a tiger tail!

London Bridge



After the bill was settled at Rainforest Café, the three of us left Piccadilly (via Green Park) to make way to the London Bridge on one of the Underground's newest tubes – the Jubilee Line. So named because it came in service during Queen Elizabeth II's "Silver Jubilee" in 1977 (a celebration of 25 years of Elizabeth II's reign),

the line is top-notch. All of the stations look like new, with platforms covered with an all encompassing plastic barrier and automatic doors to prevent people from falling on the tracks. With this architecture, it meant we didn't have to "Mind the Gap" on this line like riders do on most of the others, as there was no gap to mind! "Mind the Gap", consequently, is a pre-recorded phrase heard on the overhead when trains stop in a particular bad station. Because the stations themselves are so old (not to mention most of the routes), the newer trains don't always butt up to the platform wall; therefore, there can be quite a gap between the platform and the open doorway, hence the warning.

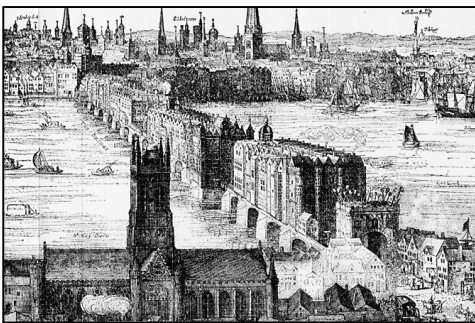


Interestingly enough there are T-shirts down at Piccadilly (sold for tourists) that have this phrase superimposed on the London Underground logo. We even saw some bikini panties with the phrase on it – now isn't that suggestive or what?



The two-stop ride took us to the London Bridge, which I had thought was the more iconic bridge usually associated with the city; I was wrong, that's Tower Bridge. Historically speaking, the London Bridge site is more important – a bridge has existed here in some form or another since the time of Roman occupation. Although the current bridge is hardly a sight to look at (it was built in 1973 and scarcely ornamental), nor the one before it (built in 1831 but it does have a unique history which I'll get to in a moment), the previous before that is the one most heralded – the "Medieval London Bridge". This bridge, made completely out of stone, began construction in 1176 and took 33 years to complete. Coming into use during the reign of King John, he licensed the building of houses on the bridge (in part of deriving revenue from taxes to pay for the bridge's maintenance – it was, after all, the only crossing of the Thames for many, many years), which ultimately gave the bridge its look. Soon shops colonized the bridge's many alcoves and the London Bridge took on a life of its own.

The medieval bridge had nineteen small archways, a drawbridge with a defensive gatehouse at the southern end, and in its hey-day, over 200 shops and houses. The bridge itself was only about 26 feet (8 m) wide, so the addition of buildings took up as much as 7 feet (2 m) of right-of-way on the street, restricting the road traffic to just 12 feet (4 m) of space. This meant that horses, carts, wagons and pedestrians all shared a passageway just six feet wide for two-way traffic. It was reported to be a mess, but many pieces of literature of the day set many romantic (and not so romantic) happenings here, which make it a most unique spot to visit.



Other reported oddities of the Medieval bridge include a collection of severed heads from traitors, impaled on spikes and dipped in tar to preserve them against the elements. The purpose of this display is somewhat up to interpretation, but I can agree that it acted as a great deterrent. A number of high-profile heads made the display, including: the head of William Wallace (in 1305; leader of the Scottish resistance during the Wars of Scottish independence – think of the film "Braveheart"),

Jack Cade (in 1450; leader of the Kent rebellion), Bishop John Fisher (in 1535; who was executed on order of King Henry VIII during the English Reformation – he refused to accept the King as head of the Church of England), Thomas More (also in 1535 for the same reasons as the Bishop. More is also known to have coined the word "utopia" and its ideals), and Thomas Cromwell (in 1540; executed for getting the King into an unwanted marriage).

Despite the severed heads I would have loved to walk on the Medieval London Bridge.

Consequently, the “new” London Bridge, which lasted from 1831 until 1968, still lives today: on April 18, 1968 it was sold to Robert P McCulloch (an American entrepreneur into a number of things but mainly oil) for \$2.5 million US dollars. The bridge was dismantled piece-by-piece and re-assembled the same thousands of miles away in Arizona of all places. Believe it or not, it’s the state’s second-biggest tourist attraction after the Grand Canyon.

Queen’s Walk

Next we made our way along the River Thames toward the Tower Bridge by way of the Queen’s Walk, a pedestrian promenade clinging along the South Bank of Southwark Borough. Established in 1977 as part of the festivities marking the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, the Jubilee Walkway (as it’s also known) established a footpath around the city of London connecting a number of tourist locations along one convenient walking/cycling route. Today it is one of several established walking paths around London and is also part of a National Trail known as the Thames Path - a 184 mile (296 km) long trail that follows the length of the River Thames from its source near Kemble in Gloucestershire to the Thames Barrier at Greenwich.



The path, commemorated by the Queen herself back in the late 1970s, took us past a number of attractions in just this short loop: the London Dungeon (a gory, ghastly, and grotesque voyage into London’s horrid medieval past), the HMS Belfast (a light cruiser of the Royal Navy served during the Second World War and during the Korean conflict; moored here as a museum), Hay’s Wharf/Galleria (a riverside shopping arcade out of a converted wharf), and to Potter’s Fields and the Tower Bridge.



Standing before the Tower Bridge – one of the more iconic structures associated with London – and setting gaze upon it was certainly a thrill. Getting a chance to walk across it was rather nifty as well! Although we had been walking about London for most of the day, being here – in the shadow of this enormous bridge – was the signal I had been waiting for to tell me I had arrived. We were really in London! Sometimes that’s hard to fathom you know...



Directly across from the bridge is another historical landmark – the Tower of London. The Tower, a fortress founded by William the Conqueror, features about 1000 years of British history. “It was here that Anne Boleyn was executed, Guy Fawkes interrogated, Richard II and Elizabeth I incarcerated and the ‘Princess in the Tower’ disappeared without a trace.” Or so it’s said as we stood in line waiting to buy tickets for entrance.

Regardless, the Tower appears both an

interesting and foreboding place, which we intended to explore in earnest today but arrived a little late to do so. With the tour closing within the hour we decided to forgo the fee and come back another day.

So we made our way back to our flop.

Considering how really low the fee is for the night’s stay this hostel is really nice. The room we’re in is on the ground level, street side. It features a four-person private room complete with our own toilet and shower (a rarity!). We really couldn’t ask for anything better when it came to a cheaper place to stay. Most hostels (I’ve heard, I’ve not experienced yet) are basically a dorm-room like environment, with shared, open



facilities. This means the showers are open and probably the toilets too. The keeper of the Rosedene, a nice gentleman of Spanish descent; tallish with dark brown hair and eyes, allowed us the entire room for the cost of just three, which was really, really nice of him. A continental breakfast is available every morning – toasts, jellies, cereals and tea – and he would be honored to help us in any way possible. I really like him. He seems genuinely happy to have first-time travelers in his establishment and that puts me at ease being a genuinely first-time traveler to England.

Otherwise, we’re wrapping things up for tonight. I’m not quite sure how tomorrow is going to be, but it seems that a return to the Tower Bridge, Tower of London and Piccadilly Circus are in store, with hopefully the addition of a couple of new attractions, such as the Tower Bridge Experience, the London Dungeon and St. Paul’s Cathedral. Unfortunately it also doesn’t look like I’ll make it to Edinburgh, Scotland on this trip (had we decided to go we would have embarked in another day or so).

Cedric and Maya seem rather cool to the idea of trekking up there, and I don't particularly want to go it alone. Not that I wouldn't do so in another situation, but considering the 4 hour train ride up and another to return just to spend one night in a city I've never been to before doesn't sound appealing at the moment. I'd rather do it with friends than by myself. Though it would be great to see the Scottish countryside, it doesn't appear that's going to happen. Maybe some other time, yeah?

On the upside, we're off to try this tea place right down the street from us – Ebury's Wine Bar and Restaurant – it looks real cozy and like a great place to get a spot of tea and desserts.

Ta-ta!

P.S.: Below is a map of our walking route for the second-half of the day so you can get a feel for how much we're actually traveling around the city.



This route begins at London Bridge (A), follows down Queen's Walk (note the HMS Belfast), then up and over the Tower Bridge to the Tower of London, culminating at Tower Hill/Tower Gateway (B) for a walk that is a little over 1 mile long.

Expedition: Europe

London, UK



“Mind the Gap”

MONDAY, JANUARY 20TH

Our second day in London didn't quite go as we had originally planned.

The night before, we spoke about going back to the Tower of London, the London Bridge, the London Dungeon, and possibly to St. Paul's Cathedral; however, we visited none of those sites today, unfortunately – not for lack of trying through. The reason for being off-schedule (pronounced the English way – “sched-ule” – if you please): rain – and lots of it.

Although we were greeted with much the same conditions yesterday morning and the day turned out to be a grand one, today would be much, much different; rather than clearing off by the conclusion of breakfast, the skies steadfastly refused to stop pouring water afterward. And not your typical down-pour either; this was your average enough-of-a-trickle-to-keep-you-wet kind. Thus, in addition to the bitter cold, we had no choice but to abandon any and all plans for visiting the Fortress, Tower Bridge and all points in between. Instead we took to walking around the City – through the “rain drips” – as much as we could stand. It wasn't all terribly dreary even so. In fact, it turned out to be a smashing good day, especially since the shower here at the Rosedene was nothing like we found at the Great Eastern Hotel – it was quite pleasurable!

We really like it here at the Rosedene, too.

It's nice, not too far from a tube (Victoria Station), yet just far enough to be out of the way. The beds are rather comfortable, firm but not hard, soft and yet not overused. And the room is comparable in size to one you'd find at a basic hotel in the States, so it's not as if we're cramped in here. I've occupied the bottom mattress of a bunk-bed closest to the door, while Cedric and Maya have taken single mattresses near the only window we have, which looks out upon Ebury Street. It's not the nice suite at the Great Eastern, but it's now home for the next few days.

Once we made it out of the Hostel, our first chore of the day was to find a place where we could jack in to cyberspace. We knew of two places right off the bat – a nearby small café (literally just round the corner) and one up on Buckingham Palace Road called “Cafe Internet”. Neither of the two looked promising, though – one did not appear to be very big and charged quite a hefty amount; the other occupied an address we didn't quite know how to find. In the end it didn't matter as a third option came upon us rather by chance: the Victoria Library.

It's a nice little library right around the corner from where we are staying; best of all, not only did they have terminals with which to access the Internet, they were completely free of charge. The three of us contacted our loved ones for about an hour; checking our emails, sending greetings and posting on forums we usually frequent.

It really is a kick to tell people you're having fun gallivanting around in another country when they're back home slaving away, you know?

Buckingham Palace

After putting the finishing touches on our communiqués home, we noticed the howling winds had somewhat subsided, and the rain, although it continued, turned into nothing more than a moderate drizzle. Therefore we decided to throw caution to the wind (and rain) and set on foot to our first attraction of the day: Buckingham Palace, just a short walk up the road so named. What the hell, right?



Buckingham Palace derives its name from an 18th century Tory politician – John Sheffield, 3rd Earl of Mulgrave and Marquis of Normanby. He became Duke of Buckingham in 1703 and built Buckingham House, as it was then known, as a grand London home for his family. In 1761, George III bought Buckingham House for his wife (Queen Charlotte) to use as a comfortable family home. It was later transformed into Buckingham Palace in the 1820s and by

1837 became the official residence of the monarchy, when Queen Victoria moved in upon her coronation. Since then it has become a place of veneration for the sovereign's subjects and a tourist attraction.

Being so one would expect said visitors would flock to the home of the crown en masse, but today there seemed to be no flocks making the pilgrimage. Only the three of us seemed to be making an approach for an audience with the Queen. And who could blame them really? It was a miserable looking/feeling day to be out after all. But that all changed the moment we rounded Buckingham Gate and entered the circle. A number of tourist groups were about, tripping over one another like a gaggle of lost geese. Thankfully so, though, they led the way to the East Front, which is where we wanted to be in the first place – standing in front of the principle façade of Buckingham Palace.



Then we got our first glimpse of the Palace... it's absolutely huge!

The palace measures 108 meters long, 120 meters deep and stands 24 meters high. The total floor area from basement to roof covers over 77,000 square meters (over 829,000 sq. feet) over its three stories. What appears to be the front door to the Palace is an archway with two columns adjoining it at the top and extending through to the third floor. Protecting the Palace grounds is a beautiful cast-iron fence replete with the seal of the monarchy – a stylized crest of lions and unicorns (showing here) – adorning.



Inside those gates, the front yard is made up of these really small pebbles (I could just imagine them going crunch, crunch, crunch under my feet) until you got closer to the guard towers, then a sliver of green grass is present, hugging the structure. Not that you'd be able to walk on the grass, or the pebbles for that matter.

No one was allowed past those wrought-iron gates today. To make sure: two guards were on premises, in full British guard. One took to pacing back and forth in front of us, kicking his legs up for emphasis, while the other stood silently still, seemingly unblinking in his little alcove. He, next to one of the many windows built into the façade, looked right at home.



Did you know that although Buckingham Palace is well known, it still has a postcode? SW1A1AA. It's the only building in London to have this particular code.

The façade faces a wonderfully adorned circle sitting at the crossroads of "The Mall", "Constitution Hill" and "St. James Park" and it is here where you'll find the Victoria Memorial. Created by Sir Thomas Brock in 1911, the 2,300 ton white marble structure is a striking memorial to Victoria, one of the most honored

Queens of England. A large statue of Queen Victoria stands facing north-eastwards (toward the Mall). The other sides of the monument feature other bronze statues: facing north-west (toward Green Park) is the Angel of Justice, facing south-east is the Angel of Truth, and facing Buckingham Palace is the Angel of Charity. On the pinnacle is Victory, with two figures seated.

Even in today's over-cast skies it was simply striking. A fitting memorial for one of Britain's most loved Queens.



Due to the inclement weather, and time of year, a changing of the guard ceremony wasn't on the schedule, nor were tours being granted inside today, but those weren't really necessities for enjoying the Palace grounds. To see the house of the English Monarch with my own eyes, the British flag flying over at full-staff, made the walk down worthwhile. Consequently, a flag always flies above Buckingham Palace now we're told, but that wasn't always the case. Previously when a Sovereign was not present at the Palace no flag was flown, but this tradition changed after the supposed public outrage following the death of Princess Diana in 1997. Now when the Queen is in residence, the Royal Standard flies (showing right), when the Sovereign is not present, the Union Jack flies instead.



Speaking of the Union Jack, as you may or may not know, it is the official flag of the United Kingdom of Great Britain (of which Britain and Scotland are) and Northern Ireland. It also retains some semi-official status in the commonwealth realm of nations (those who still hold the Queen of England as their monarch), which include: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Papua

New Guinea and Jamaica, among other smaller island states. This is why you may see the "union jack" design and colors as part of these nation's identities. Pretty cool, yeah? Very much like our American Flag, it is made up of three colors – red, white and blue – but the significance of each and their contribution to the overall design of the flag is quite different. On our flag, the colors have no true meaning (although the stars, as symbols for the States, and the stripes, as symbols of the 13 original colonies, do.)

But just what does the design mean? The current "Union Jack" is constructed out of three separate ensigns representing three of the four kingdoms of the United Kingdom – Scotland, the Kingdom of Ireland, and England – respectively: The Cross of Saint Andrew (white saltire on a blue field) counterchanged with the Cross of Saint Patrick (a red saltire on a white field), all over the Cross of Saint George (a red cross on a white field). Wales, unfortunately, is not recognized in the current arrangement, although plans may be afoot to do so (by placing a Welsh Dragon in the center of the Jack).

We left the Palace with perhaps a little better understanding of the British monarchy, or at least, a new found respect for how the crown is regarded symbolically and historically within country.

Constitution Hill & Hyde Park Corner

From the Palace our journey continued with a walk down Constitution Hill skirting through the Palace Gardens and the outskirts of Green Park to Wellington Arch at Hyde Park Corner, which really turned out to be a fascinating spot.



Wellington Arch is a magnificent triumphal marble archway thrust skyward to mark the outer gateway to Constitution Hill whose original function was to strike a grand entranceway into central London from this western locale. Planned by King George IV and designed by Decimus Burton (a very prolific English architect we've learned), the arch was intended to honor the Duke of

Wellington and commemorate Britain's victories in the early 1800's Napoleonic Wars. While it did so, it also offered up one of the grandest entrances into central London of the period. Construction began in 1826 and was completed in 1830. Atop the arch you'll find a grand "quadriga", the Latin term for a sculpture depicting a Roman chariot drawn by four horses abreast; an angel of peace descending on her chariot of war. And though we didn't know it at the time, according to my guide book, visitors can step onto terraces on both sides of the arch to grab magnificent views of Hyde Park (and its infamous Corner), Park Lake and Piccadilly, and even glimpses into the private gardens of Buckingham Palace. One of the more interesting facts about the arch is that half of its construction serves as a ventilation shaft for the London Underground network. Now that's ingenuity!

Did you know that the face of the charioteer is said to be that of a small boy? It's the face of the son of Lord Michelham, the man who funded the sculpture's construction and ornamentation. Thanks to his charity, the statue is the largest bronze sculpture in all of Europe.

Further afield is Hyde Park, one of the largest green-spaces in central London. Standing at 253 hectares (625 acres), it is just slightly smaller than New York City's Central Park but did you know it's actually made up of two separate entities? The park is divided in two by the Serpentine, a 28-acre recreational lake created in 1730 by Queen Caroline who ordered the original river dammed. Hyde Park (and its 142 hectares/350 acres) then is on the North-East side, while Kensington Gardens (and its 111 hectares/275 acres) lies on the South-West side of the Serpentine.

Although there are a number of high-class monuments and sculptures to be found in the park, one of the more interesting historical claims to fame is that Hyde Park was the site of The Great Exhibition of 1851 – a kind of World’s Fair of culture, technology and industry. What makes this particular “world’s fair” interesting was its Crystal Palace exhibition hall – a massive glass hall 1848 feet (563 meters) long by 454 feet (138 meters) wide – which stood on these grounds. The likes of Charles Darwin, Lewis Carol and Charles Dickens attended.

Speaker’s Corner, on the opposite end of Hyde Park Corner (near Marble Arch) is the second interesting location here: for here at this corner speakers of all walks, shapes, sizes and agendas are allowed to stand and speak as long as the police consider what is being said to be lawful. Walk by here and you might hear someone spouting the benefits of socialism, be asked to join the Communist Party, or even hear speeches about how loving Satan, the dark lord, is to all his followers. Really, yeah.

Hard Rock Café

Although we didn't stop at Hyde Park today (and plan to return in the very near future), we turned instead northeast onto Piccadilly Road where our final destination lied – Piccadilly Circus, once again. It was on our journey upwards that we fell into a real treat: we stopped for a bite to eat at a Hard Rock Café. Now I know what you’re thinking – “yeah, so what? It’s a Hard Rock.” But what you don’t realize is that the location we came upon is *the* Hard Rock Café. The *original* Hard Rock Café, which has stood on this spot since Isaac Tigrett and Peter Morton founded it on June 14, 1971.

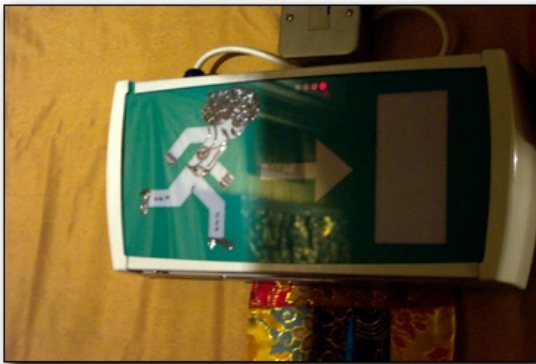


Though this rock-n-roll themed restaurant features casual American fare, it was a wonderful beacon for us to get in out of the cool weather and find something comforting to eat. Inside we met one of the most wonderful persons I think we’ll ever meet – our waitress, Delia Lees. Believe it or not, Delia has been working at this very Hard Rock location since it opened. Not only was she a breath of fresh air as far as servers were concerned, her readily offered sight-seeing suggestions and motherly advice were very much appreciated. Her warmth was a great compliment to the big bowls of cheese and potato soup we ordered. She was the star, though. We couldn’t get over how gracious and warm she was to us. I have a feeling she’ll be a person we’ll always remember and hope to see again when we come back through London later on in our trip.

Did you know that the HRC in London still houses one of its first ever pieces of memorabilia donated to grace its walls? It's Eric Clapton's Lead II Fender guitar! (which you can see in the Vault)

We left the restaurant side of the Hard Rock about an hour and a half later and descended below ground into their "vault". There we met "Jimmi", a rocker with a Scottish brogue – tattoos, rings of guitars hanging from his ears, a scruffy beard, and a bandana on his head. He was our tour guide here in the vaults (he, and the tour, came highly recommended by Delia, by the way), and boy did he know his stuff. I can't proclaim to know much about the rock-and-roll world but he seemed to know the histories of each and

every one of the pieces in the collection, which was impressive in its own right. The tour itself wasn't much of a tour, just a little jaunt into a wee space where some of the more priceless artifacts from some of the rock-n-roll greats are kept, but it was all very interesting.



On display here were a number of guitars (Duane Allman's 54 Strat, Eddie Veder's acoustic, Zakk Whyld's Les Paul, Ritchie Valen's guitar, Jimi Hendrix's Custom made V, Keith Richard's SG, Pete Townshend's LP, Kurt Cobain's guitar, Bo Diddley's guitar, and BB King's Lucille, amongst others), some shoes, and a variety of other knick-knacks that were donated into or purchased for the Hard Rock collection, such as: John Lennon's famous rose colored glasses(which were cracked on the right side (perhaps from his shooting?)), Keith Moon's jacket, John Lennon's Jacket, Elvis's Victrola and Karate Gi, the "rumpus room" couch and cushions that belonged to Jimi Hendrix (with a picture of Jimmy doing a doobie right behind it), and one of Jimi's guitars, all on display.

While I'm not a rocker, I do enjoy a bit of Jimi's "mind opening" music so it was a real treat to be able to sit on that "rumpus room" couch and hold one of his guitars. And if you don't believe me, I do have a picture of me holding said guitar sitting on said couch!



The Rose and Crown

With lunch firmly in our tummies and our tour of the HRC vault under our belts, we turned our attention to continuing the trek up Piccadilly Road. As we parted ways with Jimmi, the rocker, we said to ourselves: we just never know what we're going to run into in, under or on the streets of London. There's years of history waiting discovery, sure, but – hey, look at that! Does anyone recognize this old pub? Such as us with the Rose and Crown – one of the places we didn't expect to run into in a million years!

For those unfamiliar with the pub and its significance, the Rose and Crown has a special place in our hearts for having been copied for the UK's World Showcase in Disney's EPCOT park at Walt Disney World. Specifically, the one we found ourselves standing in front of. Located at 2 Old Park Lane, London, W1K 1QN, and although just your normal every-day kind of pub to most Londoners, what I found most fascinating, as I stood there taking it in, was the fact it had been secluded down this non descript alleyway since 1776. That made this singular pub officially older than my own country. Naturally we had to take a picture of it... who within our Disney fan family would believe we really stumbled across it? Okay, so really only Disney nuts would understand our excitement in finding it... and believe you me, we never set out to find it at all. Another great find on the streets of London!

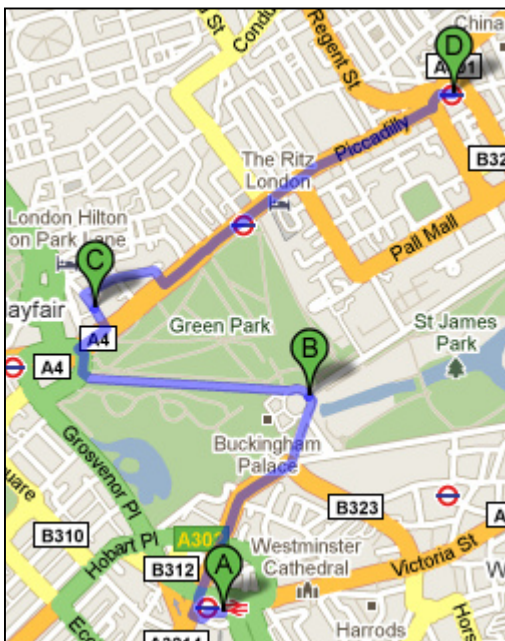


The rest of the day was spent gradually walking up to Piccadilly Circus, which is just under a mile's walk from the Hard Rock Café.

Along the way we tucked into a number of shops and strolled down a number of arcades, such as the famous Burlington Arcade (a pedestrian shopping arcade which opened in 1819 under the order of Lord George Cavendish, featuring about 40 shops ranging from jewelry to books to clothes – places like Picketts, Berk, Sermoneta, and Penhaligons); across to Piccadilly Arcade, picking up “Mind the Gap” T-Shirts (and in Maya’s case, a “Mind the Gap”, an underground map, and other assorted logo panties); into La Masison du Chocolat for a number of chocolate goodies; by Hatchards, the oldest bookshop in London (founded in 1797) and to Fortnum & Mason, one of the most celebrated stores in all of London.



Founded in 1707 by William Fortnum and Hugh Mason, it is recognized today for its high quality goods ranging from basic grocery provisions to more exotic and specialty items. It’s even a celebrated tea shoppe!



By 4:00pm we finally reached Piccadilly Circus and even by then the rain had still not ceased to fall. Mind you it had been drizzling for most of the day but now it was starting to get on our nerves. Needless to say we didn’t spend too much more time at the Circus – we did venture into the Virgin Megastore, the HMV music store and wandered over to the Odeon Cineplex to see about watching Lord of the Rings: Two Towers; alas, we had missed the most recent show time and didn’t feel like waiting around for the next (at 7:00pm), so we skipped home.

The walking route today (as pictured left) was a little more than 2 miles. (A) is our beginning at Victoria Tube Station, (B) is Buckingham Palace, (C) is Hard Rock Café and (D) is Piccadilly Circus. Not bad at all!

We ended our delightful evening with tea and deserts back at the Ebury Pub.

The chocolate tart there is so delightful, I have to say. The tart is garnished with a little dollop of orange sorbet that compliments the chocolate so well it makes my mouth water just thinking about it. It's almost worth going back down for seconds! Conversation while sipping on our tea ("two lumps please!") turned to tomorrow's affairs: Stonehenge. I find I'm really excited about visiting Stonehenge – I've wanted to see the monument for so long and it's hard to believe that wish is about to come true. There's also still a lot of London left to see – some of it I may end up doing alone – so on Cedric's suggestion I may end up stepping out on my own, but we'll see how I feel about that in the morning.

Good night!

Wait, not yet?

Oh, I bet you're still wondering about the "rain drips" reference from earlier, aren't you?

It's a cute little story because "rain drips" is precisely how this charming little girl pronounced the rainstorm we had today down in the Underground earlier. I have forgotten which station we were exiting at the time – it may have been Victoria or Piccadilly – but there was quite a downpour there and her mother was prepping her for stepping out into it by placing a hat upon her head and handing her a small umbrella (she already had on these adorable little red galoshes). As we observed the scene, the girl turned to her mother and said something to the effect of "are we going back out into the rain drips, mummy? I don't like it."

The three of us could only smile.

Quite a precocious little kid, but too cute!

Now, good night!



"It's all About Stonehenge"

TUESDAY, JANUARY 21st

Phew, it's good to get that bag off my shoulders...

Good Evening chaps. It's just past 8:00pm and Cedric, Maya and I have decided to call it a night, returning to the Rosedene from an amazing adventure at Stonehenge for a little rest, relaxation and repose. A few moments ago the three of us sat about looking over our pictures of the monument (I took dozens), but now we've each dispersed to enjoy a little time to ourselves. Cedric is over there listening to various musical melodies on his iBook, Maya is perched in the window drawing another panel in her new series "Spooky Druid" (it's a piece that I inspired – "Spooky Druid: Minding the Gap"), and I am on my bunk here chronicling the day's activities for future posterity.

It's a little much needed quietness into what was quite a hectic finish to a busy day. An attention-getting end to an amazing adventure, you could say. I don't know that I'd call it a thrill considering I could have been seriously injured or worse, but it was a rather unique and interesting experience never-the-less.

Let me explain.

Picture rush hour in the tube – people running to catch their connecting trains, stations and platforms packed with "Muggles" waiting for the next one to come by, and those who are passing through (like us) just trying to get above ground and out of the system. Next, picture these masses attempting to leave the system on just one escalator (when there should be two). What you have is utter chaos! Just as the three of us were approaching the last set of escalators that would take us off of the platform area and into the main station body, the Underground workers opened up that second escalator, hoping to alleviate the congestion. Since Cedric and Maya were ahead of me, they took the one already in operation. Due to the crowd around me, I was relegated to the newly opened one. Well, pushed toward it really.

Everything was going swimmingly until the mass crowd reached the top of the moving staircase – the next thing I know I've wacked into a mob of bodies. What might be holding up this pack of travelers and the reasons for smacking into them were not lost on me, but the stairs themselves hadn't stopped moving and thus people behind were slamming into me! Before I knew what was going on I was amidst the Londoners like I hadn't thus far been. And it was getting scary.

A few moments later the “dam” broke under our enormous collective pressure, sending bodies plowing forward like bowled over pins. It was then we all discovered that the workers forgot to move a barrier that roped off that escalator at its top and thus the people were slamming into that with nowhere else to go. It could have turned into a nightmare in the tube but thankfully someone was able to remove the barrier before things got real ugly. I was able to safely get my footing and scramble onto the concrete platform soon thereafter, but I tell you it was a quick heartbeat rising moment!

Whew...

Otherwise, today it was all about Stonehenge!

We awoke rather early, earlier than the last couple of days really, although both Cedric and Maya were already up by the time I decided to rise, having talked through the wee hours of the morning yet again. Once I did haul myself out of bed we decided to get on with the day’s activities – we showered, dressed and prepared our daypacks for the adventure ahead. The day before we decided Stonehenge would be our destination for today and we were going to stick to the plan regardless of the weather – no rain, okay!



At about 7:45am we made our way down to Victoria Station, which is just a few short minutes walk from the Rosedene. Victoria is our base of operations here in London and it’s a station we know real well now. There’s nary a need to read a sign now; as real Londoners we just walk with confidence to our intended platform! Needless to say, we hopped the Tube from Victoria to Waterloo using the District and Jubilee lines. We were greeted there to a rather large center and it was quite overwhelming at first – people rushing here and there, oblivious to the unknowing traveler who is just in their way.

London-Waterloo is home to a slew of Underground lines (Bakerloo, Northern, Jubilee, and Waterloo & City Lines), as well as the National Rail (as the terminus of 17 such lines: Waterloo to Woking Line, Reading and Windsor Lines, Mole Valley Line, Kingston Loop Line, Hounslow Loop Line, Hampton Court Line, New Guildford Line, Waterloo to Basingstoke Line, Alton Line, South Western Main Line, Portsmouth Direct Line, West of England Main Line, South Eastern Main Line, London Bridge Southern, Caterham Line, and Tattenham Corner Line), Eurostar rail service (servicing Paris and/or Brussels via the Chunnel) and other commuter routes.



It’s amazingly huge! According to literature on site, London-Waterloo has more platforms and a greater floor area than any other railway station in the United Kingdom. And with 24+ platforms, I can believe it! Naturally it took us a few moments to find out

exactly how to get to our destination, but with a quick question to a station attendant we were quickly set right. We promptly got our tickets (both outbound and return at a cost of £23.40 each way), grabbed a bite to eat from a nearby convenience store (to consume on the train) then caught the 8:35am to Salisbury.

On the Salisbury Plain



About an hour and a half later we arrived in Salisbury, a quaint, quiet and oh so British little town in the county of Wiltshire nestled within the banks of no less than five rivers – the Avon, Bourne, Ebble, Nadder and Wylde – on the edge of Salisbury Plain. Once we purchased our tickets for the Stonehenge tour bus (#3) at a kiosk just off the train station platform, we took to exploring the town on foot. At first glance there wasn't much to this village, a small shopping square, a quiet little “main” street, and a little stream running through its center, but appearances did deceive. Step off of Fisherton Street and a whole city opens up to you, spiraling out at various intersections throughout town. And I wanted to explore it all!



Everywhere we looked, though, history abounded. Salisbury is steeped in it; originally called New Sarum, Salisbury grew from just a crossroads in 1220 to what we see today. According to historical record, the nearby hilltop of Sarum had been occupied since Neolithic times. In the Iron Age, Sarum became a fort, which the Romans may have occupied during their reign (calling it “Sorviodunum”). Further along, the Saxons established a colony there, calling it “Searesbyrig” and

later on the Normans built a castle on site called “Seresberi”. By the 1086 survey of England, the area was known as “Salesberie” and thus later became Salisbury in modern English as the new settlement of New Sarum began to take hold.

Off in the distance one could easily spot Salisbury Cathedral, an Anglican church of considerable age, with many points that make it stand out amongst the many you'll find in the English countryside. It is considered to be Britain's finest example of Early English Gothic style architecture. It has the tallest Spire in all of England, sitting at 123 meters (404 feet), the largest Cloisters, and the largest Cathedral Close in Britain (at 80 acres). You'll find Europe's oldest working clock within (constructed in 1386 AD), the largest and earliest set of Quire stalls in all of Britain, and even one of the four surviving original copies of the Magna Carta, signed in 1215 AD, which required King John to proclaim certain rights for his subjects, respect certain legal procedures (such as the writ of habeas corpus), and bound the King's will to the letter of the law. Although commonly known as Salisbury Cathedral, its official name is Cathedral of Saint Mary and it has one more impressive fact to give: it took only 38 years to complete its main body (constructed in the 13th century between 1220 and 1258, but with reconstructions continuing through to 1320). Now that's impressive!

It, like all other churches in Britain, is a branch of the Church of England, a separate yet unified form of communion with what is known as the Anglican movement. As for its beliefs, the church understands itself to be both Catholic and Reformed. And with a little help from online sources I'll try to explain that: Catholic in that it views itself as a part of the universal church of Christ in unbroken continuity with the early apostolic and later medieval church (expressed in its strong emphasis on the teachings of the early Church Fathers, in particular as formalized in the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian creeds), Reformed to the extent that it has been shaped by some of the doctrinal and institutional principles of the 16th century Protestant Reformation (which finds expression in the Thirty-Nine Articles of religion, established as part of the settlement of religion under Queen Elizabeth I).

With only an hour between arrival on the train and departure by bus, it was unfortunate we didn't have time to explore the cathedral, or even step up to it. However, we were able to explore some of the little nooks and crannies along Fisherton Street. Along the way we were able to find a small electronics store for Cedric to purchase his missing FireWire cable, a component he needed for his iPod/iBook combination in order to charge and play his music, and a clothing store so Maya could purchase a scarf to help keep her ears warm – with it sprinkling ever so gently and the wind picking up that cold, damp air, it was a garment desperately needed.

Before long an iconic red double-decker bus came, picked us up, and at once we were on our way to Stonehenge. By the time we got on board all the good seats were taken, tucked away as we were in the back of the upper section, but they were still good enough to get a great view from the sides. Traversing the English countryside is clearly the way to go. Route A360 took us immediately out of Salisbury and skirted the western edge of the plains. A number of other secondary structures could be seen from here, including a number of burial mounds that have no doubt been covered for thousands of years. A switchback to A303 and then A334 took us right by the famous "Avenue" and "Heal Stone". When we arrived I was amongst the first in our group to spot the monument from the front windows – "There it is!" I exclaimed excitedly. "Look there!"

The Henge

About 13 kilometers (8.1 miles) north of town the monument raises out of the grassy plains of Salisbury like a triumphant monolith amongst the various valleys and mounds that surround it. There's no mistaking this collection of stones for anything but one of the most famous prehistoric site throughout the world – Stonehenge. Evolving from a simple bank and ditch in the Neolithic Period some 5,000 years ago, to a very sophisticated stone circle built on the axes of the midsummer sunrise and midwinter sunset, Stonehenge stands testament to human ingenuity and will. Although built by three different cultures – the people of Windmill Hill, the Beakers, and lastly the First Wessex peoples – the selection of its foundation and its overall purpose still remains a mystery today, which is part of its unyielding charm.



Once you arrive, visiting the site is quite simple. On one side of the road is the monument, standing tall in all its moodiness (the misty rain and cloud cover helped this immensely); on the opposite shore is the Heritage Visitor's Center, complete with various facilities, such as a store, a food hut, a loo, and other amenities. It is here you pick up your £6.60 ticket to get your up-close-and-personal shot of the figures. Just a quick dip up

under the roadway and you're about as close as you're going to be to this amazing structure. Follow the paved walking path and it will take you from one side to the other, allowing for a panoramic view of Stonehenge and its many components. And as I stood there finally gazing up these rocks, I couldn't help but wonder yet again: how did all these rocks come to be?

Information available on site helps detail the three distinct phases of Stonehenge's development, which is in much more detail than I could ever muster:

- **Phase 1: Earthwork Enclosure, c3000BC** /// The first monument at Stonehenge was a circular earthen bank and ditch (or henge), which can still be seen. Unlike other henges, the ditch lies outside rather than inside the bank. Also part of this phase is the north-east entrance aligned on the midsummer sunrise. Of the same date is the ring of 'Aubrey' holes inside the bank, named after John Aubrey, who discovered them. Some of these holes held cremated human remains. Were these placed here to mark the completion of the henge? None of them were used for posts or stones.

- **Phase II: Wooden Structures, c2900-2400BC** /// During this period, wooden structures were added to the earthwork enclosure. Excavations have revealed a complicated pattern of post holes in the centre of the henge as well as at the north-eastern entrance and southern entrances. Nothing remains of the wooden posts and it is impossible to tell what they looked like or the function they served. Were they tribal markers, like totem poles, or were they supports for roofed buildings?
- **Phase III: Stone Monument, c2600-1600BC** /// The third and final phase of Stonehenge embraces a period of 1000 years and is marked by a change from building in wood to building in stone. It can be divided into three stages: first a crescent of blue stones from Wales, then the sarsen stone circle and finally, rearrangement of the stones into their present form. The sarsen stone circle, with its huge squarely shaped stones, its sophisticated joints and its perfect geometry, is unique within prehistoric Europe.
 - The Blue Stones Crescent (Phase IIIa) - In about 2600BC, 80 blue stones were transported from the Preseli Mountains in South Wales, some 385km (240 miles) away and erected inside the earthen bank of the henge in a double crescent setting. Moving this quantity of stone over such a long distance would have been a considerable undertaking. It is still unclear why these particular stones were deemed to be so special.
 - The Sarsen Stone Circle (Phase IIIb) /// In the Early Bronze Age, sarsens from the Marlborough Downs, were erected and replaced the blue stones. A continuous ring of uprights with lintels formed the outer circle while five trilithons (pairs of uprights with a lintel on top) formed a horseshoe within. Each stone weighed more than 25 tonnes and had to be transported over 30km (19 miles). It was also an incredible task to erect the stones, secure them together with sophisticated joints, and shape their rough surface with stone hammers. Some of the stones have carvings, looking like daggers and axes. It is also during this period that the Avenue was built.
 - The Blue Stones Rearranged (Phase IIIc) /// During this period, the blue stones were rearranged at least three times. In their final setting, they formed an inner circle and horseshoe, duplicating the sarsen stones. The circle originally consisted of about 60 stones, and few of them now remain. The horseshoe was made of blue stones shaped as square pillar or obelisk. Its focus was the Altar Stone, now fallen, which would probably have stood upright. It seems as though this phase was left unfinished because some holes (known as the Y and Z holes) were prepared outside the circle but never used.

In the past one would come upon Stonehenge via “the Avenue”, a grand scale earthwork monument sweeping 3km (1.8 miles) from the River Avon to the north eastern entrance of Stonehenge. It dates from between 2600 and 1700BC and is contemporary to the construction of the stone circle. Theories about its purpose vary. The final approach to Stonehenge is aligned on the midsummer sunrise. Was it a ceremonial approach to Stonehenge? Other researchers think that it was the route used to transport the blue stones of Stonehenge from the river to their final destination. A low bank defines the 'route' of the Avenue with outer ditches on both sides. Much of the monument can only be clearly seen from the air as ploughing has reduced the height of the features. Near Stonehenge, however, the bank and ditch are still visible from the ground. Unlike the stone-lined avenues at Avebury, no evidence has been found that stones or posts marked the Avenue's length. The Avenue formalizes the earlier north-eastern entrance into Stonehenge. Outside the ditch, the Heel Stone stands near the middle of the Avenue, just before it enters Stonehenge. When viewed from the centre of the stone circle, it shows the direction of the midsummer sunrise. Excavations in 1979 suggest that the Heel Stone may have been one of a pair. Immediately within the bank, the entrance was marked by three standing stones, one of which remains lying on the ground (now known as the Slaughter Stone).



Simply amazing!



The whole experience took about an hour or so and before we knew it we were on our way back to town. This time we were able to commandeer the front of the bus on the upper level. The view would have been perfect had it not been raining (the windows fogged up), but even so it was a real treat to see the Salisbury Plains from that vantage point. To some, this place is nothing more than the site of a pile of rocks dragged from some quarry hundreds of

miles away. To others, it's a place to honor, worship and be mystified. For me, Stonehenge was a combination of these qualities – it was its historical significance that I wanted to cherish most. Think about it – these piles of stones were put in their place (and torn down, rebuilt, etc) well before the modern world even existed, so to finally be able to say I saw Stonehenge with my very own eyes was a humbling experience. I can't say what Cedric or Maya took away from it, but I know we all had a smashing day, especially taking pictures in the rain, then running back to take them all again when the sun came out for us!



Return to Waterloo

Once we returned to Salisbury, it was back on the train for London-Waterloo for the hour and a half return trip. At first things were going swimmingly, but eventually a cog was placed in those wheels when we were unceremoniously thrown off the train at Basingstoke. No warning, no reason, just everyone please depart here, wait for the next train and thank you very much. Although precarious at best (we were still some miles out from London), had we not been thrust into this situation we would never have met Tessa, a fellow traveler who also hailed from the United States (Texas). Tessa has been traveling throughout Europe for the last three months, she says, and was heading back to London to catch a plane to her next destination-somewhere in Spain. In those few moments we got to talk a bit and before long we asked her to join us for the trip back to Waterloo. She obliged us and was definitely welcome company.

The train back ended up taking so long that we thought about grabbing dinner when we got back – Indian cuisine (which would be my first taste of it; spicy, but good!). We invited Tessa along but she was non-committal, even though she loved Indian food. I ended up passing the delay by watching a kid and his father in the table seats next to us. He was playing with what appeared to be a Super Game Boy and he was showing his father how to play (and vice versa it appeared). He spoke just like the kids on the Harry Potter movies it was uncanny. He was having a good 'ol time with his game and it was a wonderful distraction from the slow pace the train was moving.



Upon return to London-Waterloo we entered a scene that can only be described as “quiet panic”, as the Londoners watched various overhead screens for updated train schedules and route information. As we made our way through the onlookers we learned for the reason for not only our delay, but the delays of everyone else – there was a fatality on the line. The incident, we figure, happened earlier in the day once we arrived in Salisbury, as trains there

were becoming delayed even then. Maya remarked that seeing those people huddling around waiting for information about their passage was like one of those “Diana is dead” moments that must have occurred upon her death. It wasn’t the first thing that came to my mind but it did seem fitting for the scene we walked in on.

Tomorrow I plan to be going off on my own to catch some of the attractions I’ve missed thus far, including but not limited to: the London Dungeon, St. Paul’s Cathedral, and Westminster Abbey. I’d also love to take a side trip to Hyde Park to see the Star Trek Experience set up there and, of course, there’s Big Ben, the British Museum, Madame Tussauds, and more!

Cedric and Maya are going out shopping for things she'll need for the shows that begin on Thursday (Phantom of the Opera, Saltimbanco and Lion King), so that's what they have going on. And if everything goes as planned, we'll meet up in Piccadilly Circus for a meal and a movie (most likely *Lord of the Rings: Two Towers*, as we've been discussing seeing that again). I'm very excited about seeing many other historical places and attractions that London has to offer. Should be fun!

To close, I leave you with a bit of British humour found in perhaps one of the most unlikeliest of places – on the side of a cranberry/raspberry smoothie bottled under the “Innocent” label. On its side, it read: “We've come up with a nice idea - the Fruit Bowl Chinstrap. No more worrying about whether you've eaten enough fruit - just attach the chinstrap to your favourite fruit bowl, whack it on your head and there you have it - fruit on the move. To get your Fruit Bowl Chinstrap, send in 100 special token to the address below. Alternatively, if you're just not a hat person, drink our smoothies. Each bottle contains your recommended daily intake of fruit and won't mess up your hair either.”

Ahh, London.



“Confronting Big Ben”

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22ND

Wow, what a day!

I stuck to my guns and went out alone to explore some of the sights in Greater London today, while Maya and Cedric took up shopping in the Soho district. At first I wasn't sure I'd have enough energy to set off this morning, as it seemed the adventures undertaken thus far started catching up with me. One moment the three of us were having a blast recounting yesterday's fun with the rain, wind and bitter cold on the Salisbury plains, and the next moment I began to feel ill-at-ease, worn out, and chilled to the point of getting the shakes. Hoping that I wasn't catching a cold, I donned a long-sleeved shirt and a sweatshirt before heading off to bed early, which really kept me nice and warm all night long. Although I woke rather groggily, I slept well; so well in fact that I missed the morning sunrise and my friends!

Not entirely.



I found myself utterly alone when I awoke; figuring Cedric and Maya had already gotten a head start on their shopping day, I hopped into the Rosedene's interesting little shower to get a start on mine. Thankfully, unlike the royal cleaning we received at the hands of the nozzles at the Great Eastern Hotel, here at the Rosedene the water washes over you at a lovely, soothing pressure. Furthermore, there's also no guessing at temperature at the Rosedene – simply choose a number between 1 and 10 (with 1 being cold and 10 being scalding hot) and viola, the head opens up to shower you with a gentle flow of warm water – the makings for quite a wonderful wake-up call. There's no beating that on a cold, London morning. I was savoring it. What's the need to rush when no one else is waiting?

Just as I was gathering up my stuff and preparing my daypack for the journey ahead, Maya and Cedric returned from Camelo, a nearby convenience store, having stepped out momentarily for some coffee (Blech! I'm not a fan of coffee – it's vile!). Yesterday it was the corner Starbucks – can you believe they're more prevalent here than in some places in the US? It's hard to fathom how many locations I've bumped into thus far.

Now that we were all back together, we set our plans down for the day. I advised I was on my way to the Tower Bridge, London Dungeon, St. Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey. Since we were parting ways, I took one set of door keys and Cedric's cell phone, while Maya kept her phone and the second set of keys. This way each of us could contact the other and get back to the hostel if needed. With everything set, the three of us took off together to Victoria library to once again check our Internet messages; after a few minutes I had my fill, bid them farewell and set out on my own.

London, look out!

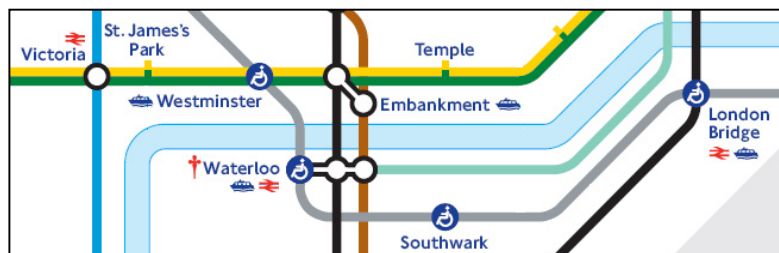
London Dungeon:

Hello there chaps.

I've found myself on a bench here at Potter's Fields Park - a nice little green-space in the shadows of some of London's more famous industrial landmarks and, of course, historical ones including the Tower of London and the Tower Bridge from where I've just come. I was on my way over to take the advertised Experience Tour - an in-depth excursion into the bowels of the Bridge to learn not only how it works but also to learn about its history. Although interesting in its own right, one of the biggest draws of the tour for me is the ability to gain access to the bridge's top crosswalk, which affords magnificent views of the Thames and surrounding boroughs. Alas by the time I reached the center-span of the bridge I decided against taking the tour without Cedric and Maya. Although non-committal, they had expressed earlier interest in doing so; I can always come back and take the tour tomorrow. So, as it turns out, I have a few moments to spare here in the Park.

Although it doesn't look like much now - there's a lot of construction going on nearby, including around the recently completed London City Hall building referred to locally as "the Gherkin" - there are plans on a placard nearby that suggest the field here will be transformed in the coming weeks to months into a world-class park. It's just a short walk down cobblestone-lined Tooley Street now to return to the London Bridge tube station and onto my next destination - St. Paul's Cathedral - but for the moment I find sitting here along the banks of the Thames to be quite soothing; an excellent backdrop to tell you all about my experience at the London Dungeon I should think.

After picking up another travel card for the Tube at Victoria, it was just a short ride to Westminster on the District line and from there a hop over to the Jubilee line down to the London Bridge station for the London Dungeon.





The Dungeon is a gory, ghastly, and grotesque voyage into London's horrid medieval past. Buried beneath the paving stones of historic Southwark, the London Dungeon brings more than 2,000 years of gruesomely authentic history vividly back to life... and death... re-created in all its dreadful detail. I found the attraction to be quite disturbing but interestingly historical. It is described as the world's most chillingly famous horror attraction; what I stepped into was a dark and sinister theme park attraction where people lay mutilated, hung, tortured, and other various oddities that usually one never wishes to think about.

The tour begins in the catacombs where a number of devices of a sinister nature – from your basic menacing looking foot-traps to your more elaborate torture chambers filled with spikes, slats and all sorts

of body slicing appendages – are displayed for our enjoyment. Here we learn not only about the devices and their uses throughout the ages, but also about some of the people who had the misfortune of befalling into, been tortured by, and/or put to death using devices such as these. During this dark time people in their thousands were persecuted, imprisoned and sentenced to death by the Church and the monarchy in the name of God and the King and it was all on display as if you were in a museum. One particular tale of torture stands out here in the story of Saint George, who was tortured and executed for his Christian beliefs. First, he was tied to a cross and his flesh scraped with iron combs (hanging on the wall there). Then he was placed on a table, nailed to it and tied up unceremoniously with chains. Next, whilst in prison, he was repeatedly poisoned to near death. And after surviving all of this, he was finally placed between two wheels with sharp points, then sawn asunder, boiled in a cauldron of molten lead and finally beheaded.

Ouch.

After the macabre walk-through exhibit of London's historical torture devices, I was next lead into a medieval courtroom to stand in mock trial for committing crimes against the Crown. The room was quite sparse, dark, and dingy; the perfect recreation of a medieval-period courtroom. The magistrate sat elevated before me, looking down upon my pathetic form with disgust. I looked up and smiled to ease the tension I was feeling, but he was having none of it, and continued lecturing me about the law of the land, why I was brought before the bench (“unnatural acts with animals”) and what was to become of me. With three hits of his gavel – *crack, crack, crack* – I was immediately sentenced to die an unnatural death by hanging for my crimes. For a moment I thought guards were coming to arrest me and rake me over some of the more exquisite looking devices of torture back in the catacombs. But as soon as the judge disappeared back into his chamber I high-tailed it out of the courtroom without waiting for the escort. I was alone and who wouldn't want to give a 'yank' a good scare?

Outside the courtroom were a number of other unfortunate patrons, sentenced to death all. Although obviously we weren't headed for the gallows anytime soon, we were instead picked up to be chaperoned through the rest of London's gruesome history. Some of it set during the Bubonic Plague, the Great Fire of 1666 and the period of Jack the Ripper. All of it re-created with every gory detail.

The Great Plague is a scene set during the outbreak of bubonic plague in Greater London beginning in 1665. Although lasting only a year, an estimated 100,000 people (20% of London's population at the time) died in agony and despair, setting off a wave of panic not seen since ages past. To recreate this trying time, disgusting smells of rotting flesh and bodily functions were present throughout the exhibit whilst recorded cries of panic and pain emulate what must have been heard at all hours on the streets of London. As if the disease itself wasn't cause for alarm, those who lived in fear of contagion sent "plague doctors" out to traverse the streets to diagnose victims and exile them to die or hastily buried them in overcrowded pits (possibly still alive). Those who died were subject to crude autopsies whereby unqualified doctors mutilated bodies in an attempt to cull the spread of the disease. It was a foul time brought to light in vivid detail through "live" actors. Oh, and watch out for the squirting bladder.



The madness continued when another horror gripped the city. It is September 1666, and London is burning. We're caught in the ferocious conflagration, amid the searing heat, smoke and chaos of a fire that began in a small baking house in Pudding Lane and will rage for more than two days, destroying half the City of London. No one knows the cause of the fire, but a Frenchman is soon to be hanged at Tyburn after confessing to starting it. The old St. Paul's Cathedral and over 80 churches are already lost. 13,000 houses have been burned, or pulled down or blown up in a frenzied attempt to stem the flames. A great part of London Bridge has disappeared. Acrid smoke and the stench of burning is everywhere. Now the city is once again full of panic stricken people scurrying they not know where, and the air full of wretched cries of women and children. Entire streets have become too hot to walk on, and so intense is the heat that pigeons hovering above are falling to the ground as their wings burn.

Although not pushed through smoke and flame, the experience was real never-the-less. We witnessed the relentlessness of the Great Fire first through a short educational film displayed in a 17th century themed courtyard before being urged to "flee" the fire down a nearby London street whilst houses "burned" all around us. After walking through a revolving tunnel lit in fiery reds and sweltering yellows to disorient us (and to show us how the fire affected those caught within its grasp), we exited this period of London's history and came upon our last ghastly scene: Jack the Ripper.

By the 1880s, the East End of London was a rather unpleasant place to live. High unemployment and low wages brought poverty and homelessness, and a general feeling of depression pervaded the air. As a result, people lived their squalid lives against the background of immorality, drunkenness, crime and violence. Robbery and assault were commonplace and the streets were ruled by thugs and gangs. Then, between 31st August and 9th November 1888, there occurred a series of murders so gruesome, so evil, that they outraged the entire nation. The killer was never found, but from those days forward, he was known as “Jack the Ripper”. Who was he? Where did he come from? Those are the questions detectives, criminologists and historians have been asking for over a century, and we as witnesses to the horrors of London’s past are about to explore the legend from first cut to last mutilation. *Dare you walk the streets of Jack the Ripper’s London?*



We are first lead to a recreation of Buck’s Row where the murders of Mary “Polly” Nicholls, Annie Chapman and Elizabeth Stride – the Ripper’s first three victims – occurred. All three had their throats savagely cut, their bodies terribly mutilated and in some cases, certain organs unceremoniously removed, repositioned and displayed for the killer’s amusement. Through the investigations of each murder we’re lead as one by one we come upon their dead bodies. How were they killed, by whom, and why? As we continue down the streets of London we’re shown a series of animations of the last two murders, that of Catharine Eddowes and Mary Jane Kelly, as well as a film listing those suspected at the time of these grisly murders.

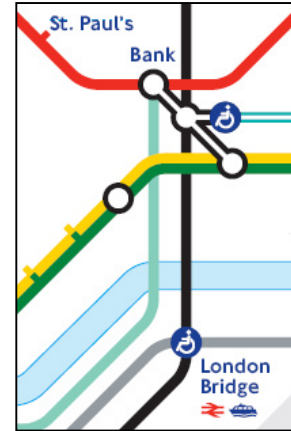
The slaughter of five prostitutes in the space of 10 weeks, all within a mile of each other, spread fear and anger throughout Whitechapel. Police and vigilantes filled the streets and angry mobs attacked ‘likely suspects’. The murderer was never found despite the investigations of the Metropolitan Police. So to this day we are left the mystery of who the mysterious killer of Whitechapel could have been. The story of Jack the Ripper is quite intriguing and was probably the most interesting part of The London Dungeon, for me anyway.

So, if you’re in London and don’t mind a little macabre adventure, visit the Dungeon. One thing to remember, though: everything experienced here really happened. And they mean it. In the dungeon’s dark catacombs it always pays to keep your wits about you, as some of the ‘exhibits’ are still in working order and have an ‘unnerving habit’ of coming back to life...

St. Paul's Cathedral

*Early each day to the steps of Saint Paul's
The little old bird woman comes
All around the cathedral the saints and apostles
Feed the birds, tuppence a bag
Tuppence, tuppence, tuppence a bag...*

Although I am not a little old bird woman, nor selling wares for tuppence a bag, nor feeding the birds, I do find myself now on west-end steps of the portico of old venerable St. Paul's Cathedral, situated atop Ludgate Hill, the highest natural point in London. Great Paul, the largest bell in the British Isles (at 16½ tons), has just boomed over my head announcing the day's time as it has done for many years – it's 1:00pm. According to documentation on site, St. Paul's has been “a place of pilgrimage for nearly 1,400 years”. There has been a cathedral of some sorts on this very spot since 604 AD, but due to many unforeseen circumstances (conquests, raids, and fires) it has been rebuilt at least five times since.



The current St. Paul's (the “new St. Paul's”) was built during a 35-year period through the resurrection and restoration years following “The Great Fire”. Just sitting here against the stone pillars hiding myself away from the blistering winds howling through the cracks and crevices of London's skyline, I almost feel part of its history. I wonder... how many people have done what I'm doing over time? How many people have seen these steps, sat upon them, and looked for guidance? Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer were married here and venerable Sir Winston Churchill was laid to rest here, among many other contemporary and historical occurrences. It boggles the mind, doesn't it?

I began my tour in what is called the Nave, a long passageway between the main entrance of the cathedral and the famous dome, and continued throughout the entire length of the space, around the Apse and behind the Quire. It's quite an impressive cathedral, I must say, measuring some 574 feet (175 meters) in length, of which 223 feet (68 meters) consists of the Nave and 167 feet (51 meters) the Quire. Width wise, the Nave is 121 feet (37 meters) across and the Transepts measure 246 feet (75 meters) in width. Since photography is discouraged inside St. Paul's allow me to describe what I saw to you, with a little help from some on-site information pamphlets.

The first thing you'll see in the Nave is The Great West Door, sitting nine meters high they're used now only on ceremonial occasions. There are three chapels at this end of the cathedral – All Soul's and St. Dunstan's in the north aisle and the Chapel of the Order of St. Michel and St. George in the south isle. Among the memorials in the nave are one to the fire-watchers who guarded the cathedral during World War II (“Remember men and

women of Saint Paul's watch who by the grace of god saved this cathedral from destruction in war, 1939-1945"), and a monument to one of Britain's greatest soldiers and statesmen – the Duke of Wellington.

Did you know that a Cathedral takes its name from the Bishop's chair? The bishop's throne, called a cathedra, comes from the Latin meaning "chair" and Greek meaning "seat". Thus a church into which a bishop's official cathedra is installed is called a cathedral. St. Paul's Bishop today is Rt Revd Richard Chartres.

The Quire is east of the cathedral's cross-shape and is where the choir and clergy (the priests) normally sit during services. Right here is where the first part of the cathedral was built and consecrated. The choir stalls on both sides of the chancel feature delicate carvings by Grinling Gibbons, whose woodwork is regarded as the finest in all of England. The mosaics you'll find here are quite impressive as well. Most were installed between 1891 and 1904 and are made in the Byzantine style. See the irregular cubes and glass set at angles? That's done so to make them sparkle. Scenes depicted are from the Creation and

other biblical stories. The organ you'll also see here is the third largest organ in the United Kingdom. Although installed in 1695 and rebuilt several times, its one of the cathedral's greatest artifacts. It has 7,189 pipes, five keyboards and 138 organ stops.

The short, central arms of the cathedral's ground-plan are called transepts. In the North Transept you'll find a painting entitled "The Light of the World" by William Holman Hunt dominating the space. This is the third version that Hunt painted, dating from around 1900, which depicts the figure of Christ knocking on a door that opens from inside, suggesting that God can only enter our lives if we invite Him in. Regular services are held here in the Middlesex Chapel, which are adorned with flags of the Middlesex Regiment. Also found here is an urn-like Italian marble font dating from 1727. In the South Transept, a monument to Britain's great naval hero – Admiral Nelson, who died at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 – rests.



The Ambulatory is the walkway around the wrought-iron gates at the east end of the cathedral. The mosaics in the aisles on either side of the Quire feature figures of angels, a griffin (north side) and a bishop's mitre with the arms of the City of London (south side). Several of the designs show something rarely seen in an Anglican Church decoration – partial nudity – which make them a rare sight. The sculpture of Mother and Child on display nearby is by Henry Moore, who is commemorated in the crypt. The American Memorial Chapel occupies the apse, or recess behind the high altar. The role of honor found here contains the names of more than 28,000 American servicemen and women who gave their lives while on their way to, or stationed in, the United Kingdom during the Second World War. A unique feature of this memorial can be found in the paneling surrounding it: a visage of a rocket, purportedly a tribute to America's achievements in space, has been incorporated.

The South Quire Aisle contains a statue of the Virgin and Child, which was once part of the Victorian-age altar screen, which was damaged during the blitzkrieg. You'll also find one of the few effigies to have survived the Great fire of London, that of one of Britain's finest poets (John Donne; who was also appointed Dean of St. Paul's in 1621). Scorch marks can be seen on its base. Also here is a unique painting I couldn't pass by without a look-see. It depicted a scene of the crucified Christ, only there wasn't an image of Christ anywhere. Instead, the painting focused on the villagers who had condemned the one they followed to this horrific death. The torment in their faces was easily spotted and quite well done. The crucifixion itself was seen only in shadow, cast upon the ground by the setting sun.

The artist, whose name escapes me, was a Russian who migrated to Paris to get from under the iron thumb of Communism. In the description of his painting, he spoke about how there were no religious images allowed to be on display in his country and because of it he became quite fascinated by the Crucifixion, which led him to paint the scene I was studying. What led him to depict a Christ-less Crucifixion was one that anyone should be able to respect - the fact that none of us really know what Christ looks like and that we all have our own image of Christ.

It really was quite moving, even for a non-denominational such as myself.

After admiring the painting, my thorough tour of the ground floor had ended; I returned to the Dome to get one last look up before I climbed it – all 530 steps – to the very top. The dome is the crowning intersection of the cathedral's cross-shaped arms. Measuring 365 feet (111.3 meters) high, and weighing approximately 65,000 tonnes, it is one of the largest and heaviest cathedral domes in the world. Between the dome's eight pillars and arches are mosaics of prophets and saints, installed between 1864 and 1888. Murals that adorn the interior of the dome were painted between 1715 and 1719 by Sir James Thornhill and feature monochromatic scenes from the life of St. Paul. And before long I would see some of those magnificent works of art close up.

Did you know that the cathedral's architect – Sir Christopher Wren – chose 365 feet for the dome's height as a reminder to all that there were 365 days in a year? Wren was also well known as an astronomer and incorporated both skills when designing St. Paul's.

Through a rather non-descript doorway on the ground floor is where you start the journey toward the top of St. Paul's Cathedral. At first the climb was easy enough; I began counting the steps as I took them, making great time early on. The steps here were easy enough – wooden, and loosely spiraled. After plodding through 259 of them I had reached the Whispering Gallery, having to make just one stop along the way. I took my rest upon a cushioned seat then, and admired the close-up views I was able to get of the dome's famous murals. As I did so, one of the quirks of the dome's construction (and hence its name) revealed itself: I could hear everyone's whispered conversations just as loud as if they were seated right next to me. It's really an astonishing act of physics at work considering the effect was not planned for during its design or construction. Even

so, it only works on whispered voices – talk too loudly and your voice won't be heard on the opposite side.



I was joined by a rather attractive young lady and the two of us started up to the next segment together, reaching the Stone Gallery next (the first outside overlook). We huff-n-puffed through every one of those 119 stairs (I more than she), and as we looked out over the City of London, I screwed up enough courage to find out her name (alas, it too escapes me), that she was from Germany, and that she and her father were in town for the day for some kind of important

meeting. The image of a diplomat and his beautiful daughter instantly came to mind. Rather than sit around wherever her father was, she took to the city for the day to sight-see, much like me. Throughout the day she had seen Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace, Trafalgar Square, Hyde Park, the Tower Bridge, and was winding up her tour with St. Paul's Cathedral. To say I was impressed would be an understatement. We conversed there for a few more minutes, hanging through the arches to take in the sights, and catching our collective breaths before the final climb to the top.

If the stairs from the Whispering Gallery were narrow and ugly, the staircase for the final 152 stairs beat them outright. The final staircase was a vertical, metallic spiral case, like one you'd find in old French houses or monuments, and bitter cold. Each step was horrendous and I began to question the decision to make the climb in earnest, although it wouldn't do to give up in front of my new-found friend. At the end of the staircase



lies the entrance to the Golden Gallery, 280 feet (85.4 meters) up. With a name like "Golden Gallery" I expected a much more ceremonious entrance; however, greeting us at the end of this very long journey was nothing more than a hole in the stone wall – literally. It was so small that I had to help her wiggle through, handing off our daypacks before joining her. Be that as it may, despite my misgivings and natural tendency to err on the cynical side, the view from the Golden Gallery was worth every bit of torture I put myself through. Everywhere I looked an uninhibited view of London could be found and it was quite a beautiful sight. The only caveat – less clouds, more sun – but that's London!



After spending a few minutes admiring the view we made our way back down and out of the galleries all together, parting ways. I took my spot here on the steps outside amongst many of London's other young citizens, nursing the very much needed Egg and Watercress sandwich I purchased in the crypt café. After exerting myself on the stairs I am not only dehydrated, I am famished! It's yummy!

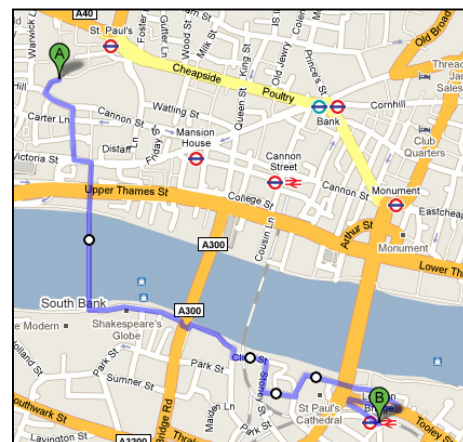
Speaking of bells (to bring us full circle), there a number of rings installed here. Besides "Great Paul", twelve more are hung in the northwest tower and are generally used for traditional Change Ringing. St. Paul's has the second largest ring of bells in the world hung for such ringing. They are just over 125 years old and were donated by a number of companies throughout the city. The smallest bell, known as the Treble, weighs just over a half a ton, while the largest, known as the Tenor, weighs over 3 tons. The bells here ring in the key of B flat. In addition to these bells, there is the original service bell affectionately known as The Banger. This was cast by Philip Wightman in 1700 when the West towers were completed. It remained alone for 178 years until the ring of twelve bells was cast in 1878. The Banger is still regularly rung prior to the 8:00 Eucharist. Another, Great Tom, is rung on the hour.

I spotted the Millennium Bridge from atop the Golden Gallery and hadn't expected it to be so close by, so I'm going to walk over to take a peek before setting off to Westminster. Ta.

Along the Thames

Drat, I just missed the train! No bother, another will be by shortly; join me as I get a little more comfortable here on this stool.

Whew, that's better. Walking up St. Paul's and then along the banks of the Thames today has certainly taken its toll on my feet, so it's good to have a little respite here in the tube station to give them a chance to relax before I press on.



The sun has started to set so time is running out on sight-seeing for today; I don't think I'll have the opportunity to tour Westminster Abbey now but maybe I can swing by the area tomorrow. Currently I'm waiting to be on my way to Green Park station via the Jubilee line to cross over and meet Cedric and Maya out at Piccadilly Circus. There's an amber signal down here in the Tube station to get through to me, so I'm hoping to hear back from them shortly, actually, to firm up our dinner plans. I tried calling while I was out along the Thames but was unsuccessful in reaching either of them.



The Southwark shores were fascinating anyway. After leaving the steps of St. Paul's I followed the slope of the streets to the banks of the river to a very unique bridge, which then lead me on a brief tour of this more interesting side of London.

Located between Southwark and Blackfriars Bridges, and seated just below St. Paul's Cathedral, is where you'll find the Millennium crossing, a pedestrian-only steel suspension bridge that links Bankside with the City across the mighty Thames. Although at first considered a blunder by Londoners, as its construction failed to take into account resonant structural responses to lateral vibrations created by the pedestrian's steps (thereby creating a "wobble" on the bridge), it has grown to become an artistic symbol of the City.

As such it has one of the more unique construction aspects built in – all of its suspension supports and cables are below deck level, allowing the bridge a shallow profile while still capable of supporting a working load of 5,000 people thanks to their 2,000 ton tension. The 13 foot (4 meter) wide deck is supported by two river piers in three sections – 266 feet (81 meters), 472 feet (144 meters) and 354 feet (108 meters) each – giving the structure a total length of 1,066 feet (or 325 meters).

The bridge creates a wonderful "blade of light" effect that affords wonderful views of both banks, the river Thames, and the attractions on either side – Globe Theater, Bankside Gallery and Tate Modern on the southern end, and the City of London School on the northern end. Including, I might add, a wonderful scenic view of St. Paul's in profile, which made a wonderful picture (I can't wait to see it). Should you decide to visit the bridge I would recommend doing so outside of school hours; on my way down I crashed into a hoard of kids streaming out of the school building, replete with ties and jackets with the school's crest proudly upon them, just like in the Harry Potter films (but alas none of them were Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw or Slytherin).



Though quite a treat to see how students from other countries attended school, I hastily made my way across before I became inundated by London's youth patrol.

On the other side of the bridge you have Bankside Gallery, which is a working gallery for two historic art societies: the Royal Watercolour Society and the Royal Society of Painter-Printmakers. It features a number of purchasable pieces and special contemporary exhibitions made available by the society's members, so it isn't always open to the public. Next door is the Tate Modern, a showcase gallery consisting of works of international modern and contemporary art dating from 1900 onward. It cannot be said that I am a fan of Modern art, but the location of the Tate is quite interesting and, I might add, quite appropriate. The building it now occupies was previously an oil-fired Power station – it closed in 1981 due to rising oil prices and was earmarked for demolition until the museum's curators sought a new location. In 2000, they opened the Tate Modern here, leaving much of the original building intact. What could be more perfect for a Modern art museum?



Down further Bankside you'll find Shakespeare's Globe, a 1997 re-creation of the original theater built in 1599 by the playing company, Lord Chamberlain's Men, to which Shakespeare belonged. The original was destroyed by fire in 1613 – set ablaze by a cannon accident during a production of Henry VIII – later rebuilt only to be closed and demolished a few years later in 1644 by order of the dominant Puritan religious faction of the day.

Today, as in its day, it functions as an Elizabethan style playhouse for theatrical works and satires. They do offer tours but I was not inclined to take one today; it is a fantastic theater to behold, though, and a wonderful visual on the banks of Southwark.

Did you know that the phrase “in the Clink” originated here? Although the origins of the name are uncertain, presumably it is so named by the sound of prisoner’s chains rattling or the sound of the metal cell doors as they closed. This gave way to the slang phrase today used to suggest one is in prison. How cool is that?

A little walk down from the Globe Theater you’ll find one of the most notorious medieval prisons in all of Europe – “The Clink”. This legendary prison fell into disuse after 1760, but its long and sordid history (stretching all the way back to the 12th century) still engrains fear into the hearts and minds of Londoners everywhere. The prison was originally used for the detention of non-conforming Protestants or Catholics (depending on how the English religious winds changed), but later came to be used for anyone who broke the peace of law in the borough of Southwark.

As such it became notorious for its dismal conditions

and for its treatment of its prisoners (recall from the Dungeon earlier that medieval London was not a happy place in which to be incarcerated.) Today all that’s left of The Clink is a museum dedicated to its name (as the original burnt down and was never rebuilt) and the name of the street in which it occupied, but its legacy still lives on in our vernacular.

And lastly there is Southwark Cathedral, or more officially known as “The Cathedral and Collegiate Church of St. Savior and St. Mary Overie”, which has been a venerable place of Christian worship for well over 1,000 years. Although I’ve learned the current structure has been sitting on site since 1220, its history stretches further back into Saxon times. As such, situated on the terminus of the London Bridge (the only way into the City for a number of years), it has seen a lot of history: heresy trials occurred here under Queen Mary I in 1555; Shakespeare’s brother Edmund was buried here in 1607 – and later dramatists John Fletcher (1579-1625) and Philip Massinger (1583-1640). Other famous attachments to the cathedral are the burial site Lancelot Andrews, part author of the King James Version of the Bible; and the baptismal of John Harvard, for which Harvard University is named.

It was also from the tower here that Czech-born artist Wenceslas Hollar drew his famous “Long View of London”, a panorama that has become a definitive impression of 17th century London.





The setting sun cast quite a favorable light upon the priory.

You'll never guess what I found down here in the tube station – a Cadbury Crème Egg vending machine! Affixed to the site of the station wall here like an old-fashioned pay phone – you know, the one's where you hold the receiver up to your ear but speak into the machine in front of you? – 3 for £1 will grant you bliss. I just couldn't help myself. Shh, don't tell Cedric and Maya as I know we're going to be eating soon (probably)!

Ahh, here's the train now, so I better pause here. I've still not heard from my friends so we'll see what happens when I get out to Westminster!

Mind the Gap... Mind the Gap... Mind the Gap...

Westminster

The City of Westminster has a number of districts within it: Bayswater, Belgravia, Covent Garden, Fitzrovia, Holborn, Hyde Park, Knightsbridge, Lisson Grove, Maida Vale, Mayfair, Marylebone, Millbank, Paddington, Pimlico, Queen's Park, St. James's, St. John's Wood, Soho, Victoria, Westbourne Green, West End and Westminster. The Rosedene is located in Victoria while Picadilly Circus is located close to the Hyde Park area, but neither is where I find myself now. Currently I'm sitting across the Thames at St. Thomas Hospital (from what I understand a very famous hospital here in London), looking over the Palace of Westminster, also referred to as the Houses of Parliament, where the House of Lords and the House of Commons are seated. I know I should be on my way to Piccadilly Circus, but, by the time I arrived at Westminster station I figured "what the hell" and jumped out of the train and made my way above ground. And why not? Just off Westminster station is where the Houses of Parliament, and more importantly, Big Ben are. As soon I left the station I immediately ran into Big Ben – he's a formidable force to be reckoned with, towering above you in all his glory as you make way to ground. There really is no escaping it.



Looking up I noticed it was 4:43pm and he was due to perform the Westminster Quarter chime (oh, you know what it is!) very soon. This chime, made famous as originating from the church of St. Mary the Great in Cambridge, consists of five different permutations of four pitches in the key of E major. The first quarter uses permutation 1, second quarter (or half) uses 2 and 3, third quarter uses 4, 5 and 1, and the fourth quarter (or full) uses 2, 3, 4, and 5. It's now the standard "song" virtually every striking clock uses. It is believed to be a variation on the notes that make up the fifth and sixth measures of "I know that my redeemer liveth" from German composer George Frideric Handel's "Messiah". The words associated with the chime, also derived from St. Mary's, is an allusion to Psalm 37: "All through this hour / Lord be my guide / And by Thy Power / No foot shall slide."

The pitches for the Westminster Chimes are B0, E1, F#1 and G#1 performed through the following five permutations:

1. g#4, f#4, e4, b3
2. e4, g#4, f#4, b3
3. e4, f#4, g#4, e4
4. g#4, e4, f#4, b3
5. b3, f#4, g#4, e4



The three-quarter hour chimes rang out as I was on my way across Westminster Bridge, built between 1739 and 1750 (and consequently the reason why buildings were removed from London Bridge), to get a better view. That's how I ended up over here at St. Thomas' – to access the walkway nearest the river I had to come on their grounds, which I find very inviting and quiet – which is a stark contrast to the hustle and bustle of traffic on Westminster. Big Ben and the Houses

of Parliament are beautifully lit with white lights to give it a wonderful glow. The reflection on the waterway is simply breathtaking.

Did you know at the base of each clock face, the following Latin phrase is inscribed in gilt letters? "DOMINE SALVAM FAC REGINAM NOSTRAM VICTORIAM PRIMAM" It means: *O Lord, keep safe our Queen Victoria the First.*

In one sweeping motion you can easily see the Palace end to end: Victoria Tower – standing at the House of Lords end, rising 323 feet (98.5 meters) tall and housing the Parliamentary Archives, which includes a number of very important historical documents: the 1628 Petition of Right, the 1649 Death Warrant of Charles I, the Habeas Corpus Act of 1679 (which reaffirmed the right that persons unlawfully detained could not be prosecuted before a court of law), the Slave Trade Act of 1807 (which abolished the Slave Trade in England), and the English Bill of Rights, written in 1689 – and the Clock Tower, rising 316 feet (96.3 meters), housing the famous Big Ben bell for which the tower is often named.

I got a fantastic look at the façade and faces of the Great Clock – it’s huge! The faces are 180 feet (55 meters) from ground level, set in an iron frame 23 feet (7 meters) in diameter. The dials are gilded, showcasing a 9-foot long hour hand and a 14-foot long minute hand. Behind the faces reside the clockworks and the bell foundry. The most interesting thing here is the pendulum, which is the approximately 13-feet (3.9 meters) long, weighs 660 pounds (300 kilograms) and beats every 2 seconds. Did you know the idiom of “putting a penny on it” sprang from the fine-tuning of the clock’s pendulum? Actual pennies are used to change the pendulum’s center of mass, which changes the period of its swings slightly enough to correct the time!

Ahh, there he goes!

bong, bong, bong, bong, bong



Believe it or not, you were once able to climb to the top of the Clock Tower, but today security concerns have forever closed the observation port to the public. Atop the tower’s 334-step climb you would have been able to see the 13 ½ ton “Big Ben” bell, the five ton clockworks mechanism below it, and the 312 stained-opal glass pieces that give the clock faces their distinctive design. Even so, it’s just as beautiful to gaze at here on the waterfront across the river on the grounds of the St. Thomas Hospital.



It appears my time on the streets of London has come to a close for today. I’ve lost the light – a light pole near the bench here has helped – but I’ve now heard from my friends about the plans for the rest of the evening. Seems as if Piccadilly Circus is out tonight, rather instead we’re going to meet at “Traveler’s Tavern”, located on 4 Elizabeth Street, Belgravia, London, SW1W 9RB. It’s just round the corner from Ebury Wine Bar and restaurant and just down the street from the Rosedene, so I doubt we’ll venture forth after dinner. I’m not quite sure about the agenda for tomorrow, though, but as it is forecasted to be another bright, sunny day, I’ll probably drop back and take on the Tower Bridge Experience, the London Tower and perhaps come back to see Big Ben, Westminster Abby, and the Houses of Parliament in the daylight. Included could even be lunch at the Hard Rock Café to see Delia again and, of course, we have tickets to Phantom of the Opera.

Goodnight London – there’s a hearty bowl of chili, rice and sour cream (with a spot of tea) waiting for me at Traveler’s Tavern tonight!



“Afoot in Westminster”

THURSDAY, JANUARY 23RD

It's 3:00pm and once again I find myself in Piccadilly Circus.

I'm not exactly sure what draws us to this area of London, but it seems we end up here just about each and every day, does it not? My guess is its central location with its quick and easy access to and from the Underground, although I reckon Green Park would make a more logical choice since it is a hub of three Tube lines (Piccadilly, Victoria and Jubilee) versus Piccadilly Circus' two (Piccadilly and Bakerloo). Alas, Piccadilly Circus does serve as THE meeting spot in this area of London, so I guess it makes sense. And since I'm waiting here under the shadow of Eros (or not, as I learned earlier) on the steps of his fountain to meet my friends for an early dinner, Piccadilly really is a logical choice. It's everyone else's logical choice too – it's quite busy! Well, with that settled, while I'm waiting for their arrival I can tell you what I've been up to this morning.

By the time I decided to get my lazy bum out of bed it was 10:00am; my calf muscles still sore from yesterday's walk about town and movement wasn't in them. I quickly hopped a shower, dressed and prepared myself for this day's adventure. Just what that would be had yet to be determined, other than holding tickets to my first ever showing of Phantom of the Opera, Lord Webber's fine show. But like most of our days, we met for our regular internet time.



Today we had to choose a secondary location – all computers at the library were booked solid. Since neither of us wanted to sit around and wait, we decided to check out a place further up Buckingham that Cedric and Maya claimed to have found. When we got there I had to let out a chuckle; it was “Café Internet”, the business I suggested to them when we first arrived. Go figure.

From the Internet café we jumped over to Waterloo to have our Eurail passes validated and to purchase Eurostar tickets to Paris (I'll expound more about this in the Paris Segment), which we ended up doing without a hitch. And once we booked passage to Paris and squared away everything else for the next leg of our journey, I parted from Cedric and Maya. They were once again off to shop and since I still had plenty of attractions left to see, I took Cedric's phone and made my way back into the City...

Tower Bridge Experience

Once again I found myself on Queen's Walk – for, what, the fourth day in a row? As soon as I rounded the corner at Hay's Wharf I spotted the bridge off in the distance, standing a formidable watch over both the City of London and the Borough of Southwark. Although I had traversed Queen's Walk multiple times on this journey, and had approached, walked over, and around the docklands area, I had yet to take on the bridge's experience tour until today. And I couldn't make my feet move fast enough to get there – the sun was out, although a bit on the cloudy side, and I wanted to make it to the observation deck before London's infamous weather patterns ruined the chance of a clear view, you know? If I could make it in time, touring the Tower Bridge would bring me one step closer to accomplishing all my sight-seeing goals in London.



The Tower Bridge, to which it is referred, is often mistaken as perhaps more famous London Bridge due to its iconic nature spanning the River Thames. It is a mistake I oft made before arriving in London and even upon first glance those so many days ago (it seems) when we first descended upon the docklands area. As I understand it, the bridge itself was contracted to ease road traffic on London Bridge, while maintaining river access to the busy "Pool of London" docks. Although not London Bridge, it's also curious to note that it received its name not because of its two big towers, but because of its location next to the Tower of London, the walled fortress with the white tower hugging the banks of the Thames and the City. And, strangely enough, the bridge was always going to be called "tower bridge" despite what design the city trust selected. Interesting, no?

The Tower Bridge Experience begins with an elevator trip. Once you purchase your tickets, you're immediately whisked 139 feet (40 m) above the river to the pedestrian walk-way level of the structure. There, waiting for visitors, is a projection film on the history of the bridge, how it was built, who designed it, and the many other plans that were offered up. It was fascinating. Specifically speaking, the Act of Parliament associated with the bridge's construction only mandated the following: the bridge must have a central opening span of 200 feet clear width with a height of 135 feet above Trinity high water when open, and a height of 29 feet when closed against vessels with high masts; the size of the piers are to be 185 feet in length and 70 feet in width; and the length of each of the two side spans must be 270 feet in the clear. A number of competing designs, such as a "duplex bridge" featuring sliding roadways, and several "high level" designs were submitted. The debate over the bridge's final design raged for a full seven years until an engineer, Sir John Wolfe Barry, devised the idea of a combination bascule/suspension bridge.

This is a tri-span bridge 880 feet (268.4 m) in length supported on two towers each 213 feet (65 m) high. The central span of 200 feet (61 m) between the towers is split into two equal bascules, which can then be raised to an angle of 86 degrees allowing for a clear waterway in only five minutes! The bascules themselves, or leaves as they are referred, weigh over 1,000 tons each and are counter-balanced below to minimize forces at work. When lowered, their weight is taken by jacks, known as pawls, which exert an upward thrust of 150 tons. The roadway is then locked together at the center by four locking bolts.

The two side-spans are suspension bridges, each 270 feet (82 m) long, with the suspension rods anchored both at the abutments and through rods contained within the bridge's upper walkways (which you can see later on in the tour). Total cost – £1,184,000.

Principle Materials	
Concrete	36,857 tons
Brickwork	27,260 tons
Masonry	30,000 tons
Granite Paving	3,900 tons
Wood Paving	5,700 yards
Footway Paving	9,500 yards
Portland Cement	20,000 tons
Iron & Steel	11,300 tons
Cast Iron	1,500 tons



The bridge was officially opened on June 30, 1894 by The Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VII), and his wife, The Princess of Wales (Alexandra of Denmark). At its opening, the bridge was triumphed as a technological wonder, and for that the Victorians referred to it as the “Wonder Bridge”. I can now understand why.

Continuing on, visitors push through and across the South to North towers via the Pedestrian walkways, which afford wonderful views of the Thames, surrounding Docklands (the “Pool of London”), Bank, City, Southwark and many other Boroughs of London. Although quite a nice viewpoint above the river, Tower Bridge's line-of-sight is somewhat limited; I found that disappointing. The view from St. Paul's Cathedral is certainly the more coveted and the least restricted. The view through Tower Bridge was not only through a plastic covering, but through the wrought iron work adorning the walkways. Still, it is a singular thrill to stand above the River Thames in this way and, of course, to experience such a unique historical structure.



After passing through one walkway, you return to the North Tower via the other, which grants views on the opposite side of the Thames (the West, although there's nothing exciting to see 'south' of the bridge), and down an elevator back to bridge level. The second part of the tour begins here, taking us to the Victorian-era engine rooms, which house the huge and beautifully maintained steam engines that were once used to power the

Bridge lifts. Just follow the blue line along the pavement and down the steps until you reach the "engine works" portion of the tour and then receive a crash course in the use of steam and hydraulics on a scale never used prior. So, how did they lift the bascules in the Victorian age?

The processes first started in the four coal-fired boilers, which were sited on the south-side of the bridge. They provided steam at 75-80 pounds per square inch to drive the pumps supplying the hydraulic system. These boilers were 7 feet in diameter and 30 feet long with double fire boxes to be stoked with coal. Two steam engines were sited under the south approach road, delivering water at a pressure of 750 pounds per square inch. Next, energy was then stored in the form of water under pressure in six hydraulic accumulators, two on the south bank of the river and two in each pier. These were controlled and regulated via two control cabins situated on each pier. When it came time to raise the bascules, signals were relayed from here to a total of eight hydraulically-driven three cylinder single acting engines. The forces were taken through reduction gearing to the shafts, which then drove and lifted the heavy bascules. It took only about a minute to lift them once the engines were engaged.



It must have been quite a sight!



Poet's Corner?



Having been dumped out on the streets of London near the “Dungeon” at the conclusion of the tour, it was easy for me to retreat back down Tooley Street to the London Bridge station and before long I was back in the Tube on my way to Westminster. Upon arrival there I made a quick decision to try for Big Ben again – now that it was day instead of night – and re-take a few of the pictures that were blurred from last night’s use of the camera on the “night” setting. This time I didn’t

walk across Westminster Bridge, though I had that in mind when I arrived. I really didn’t want to get into the mess of St. Thomas Hospital or the construction surrounding the subway entrance. Instead I decided to walk round the other side and see the Parliament buildings from the opposite angle.

That decision proved to be the best, because just across the street from the buildings was Westminster Abbey.



Unfortunately, though, my time in this area of London was rather short so touring the Abbey just wasn’t an option. Neither was purchasing a ticket just to get a glimpse inside, although now I regret that haste decision. What makes Westminster Abbey an important attraction is its historical significance to British history. According to lore, the abbey was first founded sometime in the 610’s CE based upon a fisherman having a vision of St. Peter there. A few hundred years later a community of Benedictine monks occupied the site (960’s-970’s) and by 1050, Edward the Confessor (one of the last Anglo-Saxon kings of England) had a stone abbey built as part of his palace. The palace, like everything else, fell on hard times and had to be rebuilt, which King Henry III did in 1245.



Since then the Abbey has been renovated and added to over the years – including its iconic western towers (built between 1722 and 1745). Thankfully, though, Westminster suffered only minor damage during the Nazi Blitz of the city on November 15, 1940.

Did you know that it was here in Westminster Abbey the first third of the King James Bible Old Testament and the last half of the New Testament were translated into English?

Among it being the traditional place where the monarch of the British Empire is formally crowned (a tradition traced back to the coronations of both King Harold and William the Conqueror, also known as William I, in 1066), it is also a burial site for the monarchs of the commonwealth. You'll find King Henry III, Edward I, Edward III, Richard II, Henry V, Edward V, Henry VII, Edward VI, Mary I, Elizabeth I, James I, Charles II, Mary II, William III, and George II buried here. Consequently, Queen Victoria is interred with her husband in Frogmore Mausoleum at Windsor Great Park and Kings Henry VIII and Charles I are buried in St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle.

Members of the Royal family aren't the only ones given the honor of a burial at Westminster Abbey. Quite a number of aristocrats, monks and other associates have been given honors within its chapels and cloisters. In fact, Westminster Abbey is the final resting spot of a great many number of poets, playwrights writers and scientists, including: Geoffrey Chaucer (best known for "The Canterbury Tales"), Charles Dickens ("A Tale of Two Cities", "A Christmas Carol"), Rudyard Kipling ("Rikki, Tikki, Tavi"), and Alfred Lord Tennyson (poet), Charles Darwin ("On the Origin of Species"), and Sir Isaac Newton ("Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica") among others. Even more have memorials around Chaucer, and these include: Jane Austen ("Pride and Prejudice"), Lord Byron ("Don Juan"), Lewis Carol ("Alice in Wonderland"), T.S. Elliot ("Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats"), John Keats (poet), Edward Lear, John Milton ("Paradise Lost"), Sir Walter Scott ("Rob Roy", "Ivanhoe", "The Lady of the Lake"), Shakespeare, and Oscar Wilde ("The Picture of Dorian Gray"). They make up what is referred to as "Poets Corner".



Yeah, I so should have gone inside.

The opposite side of the Parliament Buildings was quite interesting, though. From this angle the Late Gothic (or Perpendicular Gothic) architecture of the Palace's construction is striking although the emphasis of vertical lines here almost gave me a headache. Also found nearby are statues of King Richard I ("Lionheart") and Oliver Cromwell in what is referred to as the New Palace Yard. Historically speaking this is where some criminals were exposed in the pillory. Unfortunately, though, this side isn't all that photogenic until you walk out into Parliament Square which then affords views of St. Margaret's, the Middlesex Guildhall (seat of the Supreme Court of the UK), the HM Treasury, Revenue and Customs House and Portcullis House (offices for staffers). Framed by the Portcullis House and Clock Tower is the London Eye, peeking out in the background. Great stuff!

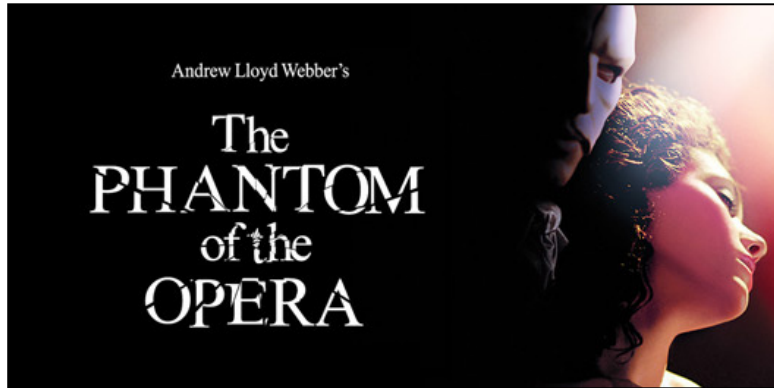


Yeah, so –

Ahh, here they come now. I'm not as yet sure whether we'll catch a meal here in Piccadilly Circus or move further afield, close to the theater. In either case I am feeling a bit peckish so just about anything sounds good at this point. After our meal it's on to Phantom of the Opera – I can't wait!

ADDENDUM – Phantom of the Opera

*Sold! Your number, sir? Thank you.
Lot 666 then... a chandelier in pieces...*



It's... well, it's late... and the three of us have just returned from a wonderful rousing performance of Phantom of the Opera, the first of three performance arts shows we'll be taking in on the West End while here. We're bouncing off the walls at the Rosedene and to continue with our delightful mood, Cedric already has the show's soundtrack streaming through his laptop's speakers. It's a fitting end to yet another nice day here in London.

Although not my first musical performance, Phantom of the Opera is one of the musicals I had most wanted to see – for quite some time, in fact. And now that I've seen it? The only word I can give the performance is – okay, two words – bloody brilliant! The show was more than I ever hoped for and it was pure pleasure to see performers of such caliber bring to life characters I had only heard in voice before. Having never seen the production (only heard it through the Original London Cast recording), it was amazing how accurate my depictions of the scenes were... and at times, how more detailed my imagination had made them in comparison to the real stage production Time seemed to go by so quickly. Phantom is such a world-class production, something I cannot wait to see again. Perhaps I'll have to fly to New York City after all and see Phantom there, on Broadway! Steady, Ricky, steady.

When last we spoke I was sitting in Piccadilly Circus awaiting the arrival of my friends before setting off for dinner. At the time I wasn't sure whether we'd take a seat in one of the restaurants nearby or move further off into untamed territories. We ended up choosing a little out-of-the-way Italian restaurant on a side street near the busy "circus" – and boy was it delicious. I can't say much about the service, though. It seemed to me the proprietor didn't speak much English – or didn't want to. A couple of hours later we returned here, to the Rosedene, to change and get ready for Phantom. Do you know that I shaved for the first time since arriving here? Egads, I was scruffy!

Getting to Her Majesty's Theater, however, proved to be an interesting endeavor as I became separated from my friends in the station on the way to Green Park. Unfortunately we picked this time to travel – rush hour – and we got quite caught up in the mess. Similar to the barrier incident from the other night, this one turned out just about the same: hordes of people on the train with hordes of people trying to get on the train, with yours truly stuck squarely in the middle. I've heard that in Japan there are special "white gloved" attendants who's only purpose is to push as many riders onto the trains as humanly possible (and then push some more). Although the Underground does not employ said white-glove attendants, they also don't have to – the people will take care of it themselves. I didn't want to board the train without Cedric or Maya but before too long that choice was taken away from me. Yep, I was pushed right off the platform at Victoria and into the train.



I mean to tell you there was no room between me and the person next to me... or the door I was squished up against. The poor bastard (or two, or three) that came in behind me had absolutely no where to go either and as I stood there, propped up against who knew what, I wondered how the doors to the train ever closed if they did a' tall. Firmly wedged between Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones and Mrs. Johnson, I waved "ta-ta" to my friends through the grimy window. Waving back, they watched as the train pulled out of the station. Fear not, though, we met up again at Green Park and made it to Piccadilly without further incident. And the show, as they say, went off without a hitch.

I wish I could say we fancied ourselves partiers and descended upon Piccadilly Circus with the intention of getting totally smashed after the show, but naturally that didn't happen. We just took the Tube home and there's nothing exciting happening down there at 10:30pm to speak of. Not that you can see anyway. And not unless you count the various "musicians" that seem to crop up during the evening hours. On the way out to Phantom we heard a Rastafarian do a mean rendition of "Red, Red Wine" (he had a microphone setup and everything – sophisticated, no?). On the way back we heard a man beating on a drum while he rocked out to some kind of music on his headphones. I wondered, was he listening to the drumbeat and playing it or was he playing the drumbeat (which repeated over and over and over) and listening to something else completely. Things to ponder, I tell you. Oh, and I almost forgot about the bagpipe playing, kilt wearing man out in Piccadilly Circus and the acoustic guitar player we saw there earlier. I have to say, London is filled with more of these folks than Montréal was, I tell you!

Talk about encountering the natives... again.

And although the mood around here is just as festive as it was down in the Underground, I feel slightly saddened. Not because we're in the final stretches of our time here in London, no. I'm struck tonight by the sight of an elderly gentleman I came upon outside of Her Majesty's Theater: as everyone exited the theater, all cozy and warm, chatting about the show and what they'd do once they got home, here sat a man and his dog against the exterior wall of the theater, balled up as tightly as he could get (it was bitterly cold tonight), shivering, his eyes closed and arms wrapped around the dog, holding a sign that declared he was hungry, homeless and had nowhere else to turn.

I've not seen very many homeless people here in the city and generally speaking most people don't think about the homeless. Either they've never been confronted with it (as I haven't, having lived in a smaller community for a number of years) or have become insensitive to it from having to live with it each and every day. But I began to think about this man and wondered how he got where he was and why he had no one to care for him. It's quite sad and it makes you angry because you'd think our world wouldn't let its citizens slip through the cracks, that we could do something to help these people. This man could have been a World War II hero and no one walking by would know. I'll never see him again, I'm sure, but that still doesn't make it better, right, or anything of the sort. People just passed him by without a second thought. I passed him the few coins I had in my pocket. I know that's not enough, but it's a start I guess. I wish I could do more; hell everyone wishes they could do more. But what can you really do?

Ahem, well...

I guess I better wrap it up here before I really do end up dragging down the party. On the upside, I've managed to collect the majority of British coins now. All I have left to get is a good specimen of the 2p and £1 (I've been spending them!). I think tomorrow we've decided to band back together and tour the Tower of London as a group. Maya also has interest in finding this tea museum nearby the Tower, although she's not exactly sure where it's located (so that should be fun) and perhaps we'll make our way back over to Hyde Park for a look-see. Further afield, I still want to hit up the British Museum for a day, with or without my friends, but we'll see what happens.

Fortune, good night; smile once more...

Expedition: Europe

London, UK



“I am One, I am Many...”

FRIDAY, JANUARY 24+H

“I am noble and rogue, mortal and sorcerer, fire and water, power and grace. I am celestial and eerie, playful and mischievous, subtle and striking, magnificent, androgynous. I am spirit and body, shadow and light, sublime and grotesque, somber and afire. I entrance and mesmerize, fusing madness and wisdom, primordial chaos - soaring, teetering, slithering. I am fluid, poetic, hypnotic, dancing, whirling, and flying. I am rebellious, defiant, and explosive. I am one, I am many. I am as we are - eternal, out of time. I am science and magic, chimeric, ethereal. I come from nowhere. I come from everywhere. I am a creature of neither fantasy nor reality, neither incantation nor dream. I am neither man nor woman, god nor demon, song nor story. I am no one. I am legion.

I am Saltimbanco.”

Cedric, Maya and I have just returned from a stimulating performance of Cirque du Soleil’s Saltimbanco spectacle, and although we are back at the Rosedene for the evening, we find we just can’t quite bring ourselves to settle down (again). It was a fantastic performance, although not flawless, but even so I can rest easier tonight knowing now that a journey has finally been completed. Tonight, following the last standing-ovation of Saltimbanco’s cast and crew, my Grand Tour of Cirque du Soleil shows – a journey I set out on to see all currently running Cirque du Soleil shows – has come to a close. It started in Montréal for Varekai (April), then went to Las Vegas for Mystère and “O” (May), Denver for Alegría (June), Orlando for La Nouba and Journey of Man (July), Seattle for Dralion (August), Tampa for Quidam (November), culminating here in London for Saltimbanco. I feel great; a perfect cap to a good day, generally speaking.

Of course Saltimbanco wasn’t the only exciting thing occurring today – we had plans to visit a couple of attractions near The City, so unlike the progress of day’s past, we would stay together for the entire day. Once we got ourselves showered, dressed and ready, the three of us took to the streets of London and prepared for the Bramah Tea Museum and the Tower of London, which was supposedly right nearby. Mama was at the helm of the morning’s activities, having drawn up the plan of action for the day, so we followed her lead. We popped out of the Tube at Monument... and the adventure began.

Bramah, Monument and the Wall

In the year of Christ 1666, on the 2nd September, at a distance eastward from this place of 202 feet, which is the height of this column, a fire broke out in the dead of night, which, the wind blowing devoured even distant buildings, and rushed devastating through every quarter with astonishing swiftness and noise...

That's just part of the passage, inscribed in Latin on the North panel of this amazing and poignant monument. You'll find it resting just outside the Monument Tube station (so named) commemorating the Great Fire of London which occurred here in 1666. According to historical accounts (and contemporary re-creations as I experienced earlier at the London Dungeon), the great fire was set by accident in the bowels of a bakery shop and it spread, destroying a good portion of the city over the next three days. The passage goes on to say the raging inferno consumed 89 churches, gates, the Guildhall, public edifices, hospitals, schools, libraries, a great number of blocks, 13,200 houses, and 400 streets. Of the 26 wards of London at the time, 15 of them were utterly destroyed while 8 were mutilated and half-burnt. In the end 436 acres of City were reduced to ash.



To commemorate this awful tragedy, a simple Doric-style column of Portland stone was designed by two of the most important and well-renowned designers of the day: Sir Christopher Wren, who I learned a bit about at St. Paul's Cathedral as its designer; and Robert Hooke, a scientist known for his law of elasticity (Hooke's Law, $F = -kx$ where x is the displacement, F is the

resulting force exerted, and k is the spring constant), his work in developing the field of microscopy, and for coining the term "cell" to describe the basic unit of life. The column has atop it a flaming urn of copper to symbolize the conflagration.

Climb the spiral staircase of 311 steps to the balcony at the top and you are rewarded with breathtaking views over the city in all directions, as well as a certificate of achievement. Below, three sides of the base carry inscriptions in Latin: the south side describes actions taken by King Charles II following the fire, the east side describes how the monument was constructed, the north side describes how the fire got started, how much damage it caused, how it was extinguished, and who, ultimately, the citizens blamed for starting the fire: Roman Catholics.

A second, smaller monument, called the Golden Boy of Pye Corner, marks the point in Smithfield where the Great Fire of London stopped. You'll find it on the corner of Giltspur and Cock, with the following inscription underneath it: "*This Boy is in Memmory(sic) / Put up for the late FIRE of LONDON / Occasion'd by the Sin of Gluttony, 1666*".

Unfortunately there was little chance to stop and explore Monument, or even make the trek to its observation deck on top, but I did find it fascinating to lay my eyes upon and perhaps in those brief moments, come to better understand the historical significance of the memorial; especially after learning about the fire first-hand at the London Dungeon. Eventually we made our way back across the London Bridge. Although it was the first time we'd walk across this particular bridge, having been down in the area thrice before, and walked a number of kilometers in this very same vicinity, I was not real keen to do more of it (and neither were my feet, as blistered as they were). But I dredged on and we finally came upon the Bramah Museum of Tea and Coffee, our destination!

Located on 40 Southwark Street in SE1, very close to London Bridge station and Borough Market, the Bramah Tea and Coffee Museum is one of the world's first museums completely dedicated to the history of these two commodities. Over 400 years of commercial and social history surrounding tea and coffee can be found here, but more importantly, you can sample some of the teas and coffees on their shelves right in their tearoom. And wouldn't you know we arrived just in time for noon-tea?



The scones and jelly with chocolate cake were scrumptious indeed!

Not only can you learn about the history of tea (and coffee, both of which are sordid tales of decades in length and therefore incapable of being described here with any hope of accomplishment – but suffice it to say, Tea made its way to Europe from China via Portuguese and Dutch merchants in 1610. Tea has been at the forefront of British society ever since, first as a status symbol in Elizabethan times, due to the nature of the delicate teaware, and then as a drink for the masses during the Industrial Revolution, as the addition of milk and sugar invigorated the working masses with much needed sustenance), track the history of your favorite tea blend ("*Tea. Earl Grey. Hot.*"), and even see the largest tea pot in the world (a commemorative piece, intended to honor the memory of the people who brought fame to the world of tea).

Speaking of the teapot – those men and women who made brewing tea famous are commemorated through paintings on the pot's side. It was built in six stages and took nine days to construct. The clay was left to dry slowly for about three months before being fired up. The teapot is impressive in its own right, standing 2-feet 6-inches high, having a circumference of 6-feet 4-inches, with a weight of 89-pounds empty (339-pounds full). Can you guess how many pounds of tea it takes to make a full pot and how many cups that would make? It takes approximately four pounds of tea to steep a full pot, making 800 separate cups.

Now that's impressive!

After our afternoon spot of tea, and viewing the eclectic array of tea and coffee related artifacts spruced about the cluttered about, the three of us paid our bill and took our leave of the museum. Once again we trudged down Queen's Walk along the River Thames toward the direction of Tower Bridge, and then crossing it. On the other side lay our second destination for the day: Tower of London.

Did you know that Houndsditch derived its name from a passage written by 16th century historian John Stow? He said "from that in old time, when the same lay open, much filth (conveyed forth of the City) especially dead dogges were there laid or cast." As one of London's rubbish disposal sites, it was quite well known for its odor and thus got its name.

On the way over we ran into one of the last remaining remnants of the Roman Wall that once surrounded London, or as they called it, Londinium. Londinium was founded by Roman forces in the year 47 AD and according to information available nearby, the original wall was constructed from a very hard bluish-grey colored limestone from the Maidstone area of Kent, a county southeast of London, and once enclosed an area of about 330 acres. It measured anywhere between six to nine feet wide and about eighteen feet high, and was constructed out of at least 85,000 tons of stone. A trench was built in front of the wall to deter climbers some six feet deep and

between nine to fifteen feet wide in places. The Moat has even its place in London's lore as forming the line of what is now Houndsditch.

You might also be wondering at this point if the creation of the wall was also the genesis for many "gate" names within the city and if you asked yourself that question you'd be absolutely right. Six of the seven famed gates of London were built by the Romans: Ludgate (demolished in 1760), Newgate (demolished in 1767), Aldersgate (demolished in 1761), Cripplegate (demolished in 1760), Bishopsgate (the area in which we initially stayed upon our arrival here, demolished in 1760), and Aldgate (demolished in 1761). Moorgate (demolished in 1762) came during the medieval period and was built between Cripplegate and Bishopsgate. Through these gates were the many Roman roads that led to nearby Roman bastions, territories and cities and although none of them stand to this day, their legacies live on though names of boroughs, streets, or buildings.





A statue of Emperor Marcus Ulpius Nerva Traianus, or more commonly known as Trajan, is erected on the site at Tower Hill where you can still view a rather sizeable chunk of what remains of the old Roman Wall. Emperor Trajan is best known for his public works projects in Rome, which helped reshape the city at that time (leaving enduring landmarks such as the Forum, the Market and a Column in his name – all of which I hope to see when we land in Italy later

on in our European Adventure here), and militarily known for launching a campaign against Parthia that extended the Roman Empire to its greatest extent (117 AD).

Talk about accomplishments!

Tower of London

Tower Hill is aptly named as the home of the Tower of London, a royal palace, prison and fortress built to guard the great city, in 1078. Although commonly identified with the stark White Tower that peeks above all others on the grounds, The Tower is a huge complex of several buildings set within a number of defensive walls and moats. In fact, it is here the infamous “Traitor’s Gate” resides and the phrase “Sent to the Tower” originated, propagating a number of legacies that have become part of our culture today, such as “the Princes in the Tower” (Richard III – Shakespeare), Queen Elizabeth I, Henry VI, Anne Boleyn, Lady Jane Grey, Guy Fawkes and Sir Walter Raleigh. Besides a historical center-point, the Tower has also served as an armory, a treasury (and the Royal Mint), a zoo, and a hoard of other uses and facilities.



We couldn’t wait to explore it all.



Tower, Queen's House, and Beauchamp Tower), the White Tower, and the Crown Jewels building.

The Tower of London is subdivided up into a number of areas to help visitors navigate this sprawling structure, these include: Water Lane (which includes Middle, Byward, Bell and Cradle towers, Traitors' Gate and Henry' III's Watergate), The Medieval Palace (which includes St Thomas's, Wakefield and Lanthorn towers), the Wall (which includes Salt, Broad Arrow, Constable and Martin towers), Tower Green (which includes Bloody

Western Entrance/Water Lane – Single visitors begin their adventure here at the Western Entrance, walking through the Middle and Byward towers. Although this lane is now paved, it once used to be a series of drawbridges and check-points, created to help fortify the Tower against encroachers. Even the Moat, which would have run through here, is dry today, rendering many of these security features useless (and, of course, many alterations in years past degraded them as well).

The infamous Traitors' Gate lies nearby and is probably the single most important "attraction", if you will, here at Water Lane. For it is here that many prisoners accused of treason supposedly passed through, including Queen Anne Boleyn, The Archbishop of Canterbury (who declared Mary I illegitimate and supported the attempt to place Lady Jane Grey on the throne, a Protestant) and Sir Thomas More (who acknowledged Henry VIII as head of the English Church instead of the Pope), whose fates were determined here. Other points of interest here are the Bell Tower, which is the oldest tower in the castle (other than White Tower; it was constructed in the 1190s; Lion Tower, which is no longer standing (it held the Royal Menagerie, a zoo, which was relocated in 1834 to form the nucleus of the London Zoo), got its name from the lions that King Henry I kept there; and Mint Street, where the Royal Mint once stood.





Medieval Palace – Off to the right of Water Lane and just beyond Traitor’s Gate lies the entrance to the Medieval Palace, a place for the Kings and Queens of England when in residence. The rooms here are shown as they might have appeared in the reign of King Edward I (1272-1307). This is a fascinating area of the Tower to explore as you are surrounded by stone. Here you’ll pass through the King’s strong room, private hall, Oratory (in St. Thomas’s Tower), and

Wakefield tower, with its vaulted ceilings, large windows and a fireplace, served as the original bedchamber of King Henry III. In Edward I’s time, the chamber was used as an ante-room to the new chambers in St. Thomas’s Tower. A throne occupies an embrasure here. Did Edward I sit in it? Did any future King? It’s interesting to ponder...Continuing to wander about here you’ll find a small chapel behind the painted timber screen, which Henry VI (1422-1461, 1470-1471) may have used during his imprisonment and its traditionally said he was murdered here as he knelt in prayer.

The Wall Walk – This walk takes visitors round the towers along the east side of the castle from the Salt Tower to the Martin Tower, eight in all, which is an interesting walk in its own right. The Salt Tower was used as a prison tower and many Catholic priests were held here during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603). In fact, you can see some of their inscriptions caved into the walls made during their imprisonment. Next is Broad Arrow Tower, which was once used as the Wardrobe later became a prison tower – Queen Elizabeth I was held here during the Protestant uprisings in the reign of her sister, Queen Mary I. Constable Tower is next up, which houses a model showing how the Tower might have appeared circa 1335, during the reign of King Edward III. We come upon Martin Tower, which for a number of years was known as the Jewel Tower because the Crown Jewels were once displayed here. Although they have moved onto another location within the Tower, you’ll still find the frames of the coronation crowns worn by George IV (1821), Queen Adelaide (1831), and Queen Alexandria (1902), and the state crowns made for George I (1715) and Queen Victoria (1838). Historically, an infamous theft of the crown jewels was attempted here by Colonel Blood in 1671. The rest of the crown jewels are located in the Jewel Building, which we also toured.



Other towers such as the Brick Tower, Flint Tower and Bowyer Tower lay beyond. Although these are mostly closed to the public, it's interesting to note that Bowyer Tower is where it's traditionally believed that George Duke of Clarence, brother of Edward VI, was executed here in 1478 by drowning in a butt of malmsey wine. And there's also Devereux tower, which was used to fire into the city of London during the Protestant Uprising.



Tower Green – From here we enter Tower Green a large green-space within the inner most sanctum of the Tower's fortress. An array of multi-colored brick buildings opens up around you, each with their own bloody histories. In fact, the Bloody Tower is here, which got its name because it was in this tower the "Princes in the Tower" were traditionally believed jailed and murdered in cold blood. The story goes: the princes, 12-year old Edward and his younger brother Richard (sons of Edward IV), had been lodging in the tower following their father's death in 1483, under the protection of their uncle, Richard Duke of Gloucester. Preparations began for Edward's coronation but their uncle was crowned in his place, as Richard III. The princes remained locked away in the tower for a number of years before simply disappearing without a trace. Although this is a grisly piece of history to walk through, the Tower was also used for general imprisonment. Sir Walter Raleigh, who was charged with plotting against King James I, was imprisoned here for thirteen years (1603-1616). In fact, the Tower is now furnished as it might have appeared during this time. The lower chamber was Raleigh's study, containing his books and other items dating from the early 17th century, while the upper chamber is shown as his bedchamber. Quite interesting!



The Queen's House, a black and white timber-framed building from the Tudor era, is also nearby. Although not open to the public today, it was here that a number of high-ranking prisoners were lodged. Guy Fawkes was interrogated and tortured here for his participation in the Gunpowder Plot (the Fifth of November conspiracy to blow up James I and Parliament.) Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII's wife, was also held here before her execution by beheading.

You'll also find The Block here, a gruesome spot where a number of prominent executions took place in an "off with their head" style. Most executions took place outside the walls on Tower Hill, but some were granted private executions either to stop the elicitation or riot or just to preserve some level of privacy and dignity. The first of these famous executions was William, Lord Hastings in 1483. Anne Boleyn was beheaded in 1536, followed by Catherine Howard in 1542 – Henry VIII's second and fifth wives – convicted of adultery. Jane, Viscountess Rochford, Catherine's lady-in-waiting; Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury, was beheaded in 1541; Lady Jane Grey in 1554 and last, but not least, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex (and young favorite of Elizabeth I) came before the block in 1601.



Gruesome!



Last, but certainly not least, is the White Tower, the most imposing and historic building in the whole fortress. Built by William the Conqueror (1066-1087) in the aftermath of the Norman Conquest, the tower stands an impressive 90 feet high (27.4 meters), measuring in at 118 feet (35.9 meters) by 107 feet (32.6 meters) across, and like most of the rest of the grounds, was constructed as both a fortress and a residence for the King.

As such you'll hear it referred to it as a "keep" – in fact, it's one of the most famous "keeps" in Europe. Although there are a number of floors to explore here, each with their own treasures to uncover – such as the Chapel of St. John the Evangelist – it's the armory on the ground floor that dates to the time of Henry VIII that's sure to please. There's rifles, canons, horse armor, suits of armor, hand guns of all shapes and sizes, shields, masks and plates.

It was all very fascinating. An especially interesting piece is an elegant sporting gun made of Silver. It came from the personal gun-room of King Louis XIII of France. Another unique piece is a gun made specifically for Charles I when he was a young man. Not to mention a rather anatomically correct suit of armor that King Henry VIII wore in times of need.





Our tour concluded in the armory; upon exiting the White Tower we had effectively seen all we came to see at the Tower of London. We took a last look around, reveling in the history, took a few last parting pictures and began to make our way back out through the Western Entrance.



On our way out, though, one of the Tower's resident Ravens came to pay us a visit. Did you know that there have always been ravens associated with the Tower of London throughout its history? They even have names! The males: Jim Crow, Gwylum, and Thor; the females: Hugin and Munin. Although there are more and I'm not sure who came to pay us a visit, they're very much part of the lore here. In fact, Charles II stated once that when there were no longer ravens at the Tower the British Commonwealth would fall. Since then they've been given preferential treatment and are actually housed on site. The Yeoman Warders, better known as Beefeaters, look after them as the ceremonial guardians of the Tower.

Before long darkness was beginning to befall the White Tower, so the three of us left and made our way back to the Rosedene to pick up the tickets for our next adventure: Saltimbanco, playing at London's formidable Royal Albert Hall. We found a nifty little pizza place to sit down to a quick meal along one of the alleyways; then we were off.



I am Legion, I am Saltimbanco!



A trip to London is never complete without taking in the West End - the theater district. The journey thus far was different and while we I took in Phantom of the Opera (at Her Majesty's Theater) yesterday and are planning to see The Lion King (at Lyceum Theater) tomorrow evening, I was most excited and anxious to be here; the original reason I ended up coming to London in the first place - Saltimbanco.

Saltimbanco, currently Cirque du Soleil's oldest touring show, is described as being a "celebration of life" and I heartily agree. Its colorful kaleidoscope of images, characters and themes continue to weigh in on the times, providing us all a new vision of what life can be: optimistic and peaceful. I found Saltimbanco within the formidable Royal Albert Hall,

a venue built in 1871 as a concert hall. Set amidst this posh, expansive performance space was the familiar playing field of Cirque: the stage, musician's platform and multi-colored ceiling. As I took my seat along the far side (with Cedric next to me and Maya in the row ahead of us) I was able to observe my surroundings - and its shortcomings - with greater ease.

I looked out across my viewing field and sighed, it was anything but excellent. It appeared that I was in a makeshift seating arrangement on the floor of the Hall - the front of the stage was not as close as I would have liked and my side view was cut off because the sides of stage rose above my head. I would have been able to see under the stage (or walk under it, it was up that high!) if it hadn't been curtained off with black felt-like material. Even there I was denied and it was painfully obvious that I was being punished. Here I was stuck in the corner with the opportunity to see the semi-circle of the stage only! To make matters worse, directly in front of me was a rigging apparatus. It wasn't a pole so it was easy to see through, but the ropes that ran down to it traversed my viewing field. In a sense I'd be looking at the show through bars. I felt trapped in my seat and the limited viewing capability it brought. I could barely see the musicians play! What a way to see a show for the first time...

Before long the pre-show festivities began. Like all Cirque du Soleil shows, a variety of characters and clowns make the rounds of the big top to "be of assistance" to those seeking their seats or just to cause a commotion. Saltimbanco was no different in this regard... perhaps with one exception - there were more characters and much more mayhem! Neither Cedric nor I knew what characters had made their appearance because the laughing and carrying-on were happening on the other side of the stage in a location we couldn't see. But soon we'd snap our necks to our immediate right when we heard shuffling underneath the stage. Something was about to happen... we just didn't know what!

And then I saw it... a sneaker. Then two. They were small and white and tapping. What they were doing behind the black curtain was beyond the two of us when - pop - out came a face; it was a "worm"! And then another! And another! One by one the masked "worms" came out from under the stage and invaded the theater, each waving, nodding and generally looking around in confusion. From the other side of the stage then were the Saltimbanques, the partygoers of Saltimbanco. Together these characters created such chaos throughout the theater that Cedric and I heard laughter for the rest of the pre-performance! At one point, the Saltimbanques commandeered a row of seats in the front seating section and sat down. When the ringmaster, propped upon the multi-colored ceiling, voiced his opinion on the matter, they all yelled back and held up tickets! What a riot! But I tell you; once the real show started we were treated to a wonderful performance – and that bad seat I was in melted away.

From the moment Kumbalawé began to the ending of Horéré Ukundé, I was entranced by the music and enthralled by the movement. Below are some observations I made about the show (and don't forget it just so happened that next to me was a doorway into the underworld of the show!)



- Saltimbanco was originally supposed to follow a specific "running order" of: Opening, Adagio, Chinese Poles, Clown, Double Wire, Juggler, Boledoras, INTERMISSION, Russian Swing, Duo Trapeze, Clown, Hand to Hand, and Bungees. Unfortunately the Duo Trapeze and Double Wire did not perform. Instead, in the place of the Double Wire was the one-man Diabolo act and in place of the Duo Trapeze was the Solo Trapeze performance.
- An energetic fellow performed the Diabolo act by the name of Mitchell Head and at first sounds rather strange to be a one-man act - especially in a Cirque setting. But the performance was very well done and quite thrilling! One of the tricks this artist performed was an overhand catch of the diabolo using only the sticks and rope strung between them. It was so quick that if you blinked you would have missed it! The act was performed to a piece of music I had never heard of before.
- The Single Trapeze was performed by a young artist named Anna Ward to a piece of music entitled Cantus-Mélopie. Her performance was a slow sensuous dance routine perfectly timed with the slow melody of the music. I loved the costume and I loved the music but her performance did not capture the audience, or me. And that's a pity.
- The cover to the service platter that is brought out at the beginning of the show did not contain the blue and yellow stripes of a big top. The dome was a representation of the Royal Albert Hall instead!

- There's only one thing I can say about the clown: Oh my God. While it would have been a blast to see Rene Bazinet perform Eddie, Jesko Von Den Steinen from Germany played him brilliantly. Not only did he have Rene's signature squeak down but he was so hilarious that he had the entire hall in stitches. He performed this "stuck in a bathroom" routine that simply brought the house down! And, of course, the gun-fight.
- The Juggler was an energetic young woman who performed quite well and pleased the audience. Unfortunately her act came right after the Diabolo and Boladeras followed. Way too many juggling-type acts in a row.
- The Hand-to-Hand performance by Andrezej Piechota and Tomasz Wlezien was top notch. This pair performed many maneuvers I had not seen before in a duo Cirque act such as this... and it was a refreshing performance to see. Watch out Lorador Brothers... these guys can give you a run for your money!
- Russian Swing was infectiously fun. Even if it isn't as spectacular as the version in "O" or the daring version in "Varekai", the Russian Swing in Saltimbanco is still very, very fun.
- Intermission came right after the Boladores and it didn't seem right. There was no ceremony of sorts to introduce us to the fact that there was an intermission coming, like in Quidam (with the balloons) and Alegría (with the snowstorm). So it was very strange to have the lights suddenly rise after the act had ended. I can tell you I was very confused and even had to consult the free show guide that was stuck in my seat.
- Watching the riggers do their job throughout the show was a real treat. All the checks and re-checks I watched them go through were simply mind-boggling. All the safety wires seemed hand-controlled and the ropes that raise the performers from stage to sky were also at the hands of the riggers. I remember vividly watching the rigger during the entire Single Trapeze act - the pulling and letting go of her safety rope during the performance and the riggers' bobbing up and down as she dismounted, providing her a smooth descent to the stage floor. Even some of the performers (on their off moments) came down to help with the rigging. And that I thought was very cool!
- Speaking of the rigging, the center structure must have taken quite a bit of thought and time to construct. The ceiling is awfully high in the Royal Albert Hall and there was no construction or support for them to build from. The result was a series of cables criss-crossing across the ceiling that supported the central bar and foundation for acts like the Trapeze and Bungees to work from.

Saltimbanco was a magical performance and I was thankful that I could finally see it live. Unfortunately, I have to agree with some and disagree with others to say that the show is ready to have its final curtain call. It's a beautiful show do not get me wrong, but it is a show that has been eclipsed by many other great Cirque shows in form of theme, technique, presentation and acrobatics. Perhaps it was the fact that the venue didn't seem to suit Cirque at all. Or, perhaps it was the poor viewing seat I had. Regardless of the view I hold of the show at least the three of us had a great time - Maya most of all, as she had one of the Saltimbanques sit next to her during the show's finale!

After the final curtain call we returned to the Tube and made our way back here, to the Rosedene. Tomorrow is going to be quite a busy day: we're going to see about laundry and other needs before we embark on the next leg of our journey – to Paris! In the meantime, I'm going to check out the British Museum.

I can't wait!



Expedition: Europe

London, UK



“Teetering in Tottenham Court”

SA+URDAY, JANUARY 25+H

Greetings and salutations, friends and fellow travelers.

I’ve just had a fabulous morning exploring the many millions of historical artifacts found on display at the British Museum, a comprehensive exhibition of human history and culture – awesome pieces of antiquity from the Pharonic era of Egypt, Greece, Nubia, Syria, the Roman Empire, and more – situated in the very heart of the old British Empire. Walking the halls of this famed museum on this brisk morning was simply a fantastic experience from beginning to end. There was so much to see and do I was on the go the moment I stepped foot inside. Every turn offered a new relic to examine, a new artifact to admire, a new piece to objectify. I absorbed and marveled at each one.



To recover now I’ve returned to our oasis in London and sprawled out here on my bunk at the Rosedene. Nearby are my fellow travelers – Cedric Pansky and Maya Abrams – who, like me, are taking a few moments to decompress. It’s been a busy day for all of us. While I’ve been out taking a stroll through history, Cedric and Maya remained behind to tend to our laundry needs, which the proprietor of the Rosedene was so kind enough to have done for us. Today was our last full day here in London and we’re all out of clean clothes, so we really didn’t have a choice. Although I had assumed our clothes would be washed, dried and pressed by now, there’s still plenty of time left in the day, so there are no worries – this was an expected expense traveling a month around Europe.

The delay has allowed me to offload today’s pictures and tell you more about my experiences this morning. As planned I arose at about 9:00am, dressed, and made my way down to the Museum through the Tottenham Court Road station. I had planned to get up an hour earlier but after the alarm on my watch chimed, I wanted nothing of it. So I laid in bed for quite some time before finally choking up the effort to pull back the sheets and get underway. Eventually I did so, left a pile of clothes for Cedric and Maya to include in the laundry service, had a bit of toast and jelly from the downstairs breakfast nook, and then took off.

Part 1 – The British Museum

Russell Street, London, WC1B 3DG is where visitors can find the compound supporting the British Museum. There's a number of ways one can reach its steps using London's venerable Underground system; four stations lie nearby at various distances to serve the Museum – Tottenham Court Road (300m, on the Northern and Central lines), Holborn (500m, on the Central and Piccadilly Circus lines), Russell Square (800m, on the Picadilly Line), and Goodge Street (800m, on the Northern Line).



I popped out from Holburn and arrived at the steps of the British Museum about 10:10am. I expected quite a crowd upon arrival, which is why I wanted to get here at opening hour, but there was none to be seen. And since the museum doesn't have an admission policy, and therefore one could walk right in, I did so, paid for a map and took off for the Egyptian collection. Really, that's all I wanted to see at the museum in the first place – to view their collection of Egyptian artifacts with my own eyes. And what a collection they had!

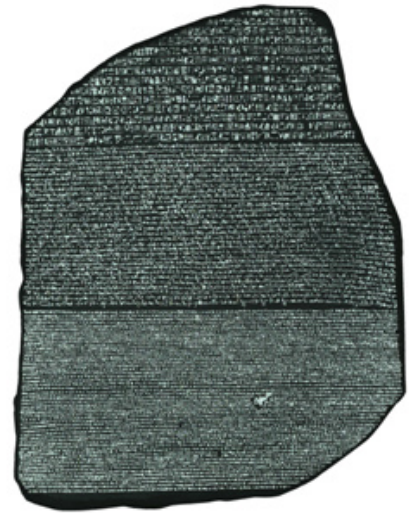
The Department of Ancient Egypt houses the world's largest and most comprehensive collection of Egyptian and Sudanese artifacts (outside of its counterpart in Cairo), and includes objects from all periods and sites of importance in Egypt and the Sudan. Illustrated throughout these halls are antiquities representing the cultures of the Nile Valley from 10,000 BC through to the Coptic times of 12th Century AD. Over 100,000 objects span over 11,000 years of history on display across two floors; First, on the ground floor (in room 4), an entire expansive room was filled with all manner of statuary, manuscripts, sarcophagi, and an assortment of other nifty Egyptian artifacts. Secondly, on the second floor (filling rooms 61-66), were more priceless pieces of the collection, including mummified animals (62), the tools for mummification (63), exhibits on Ancient Egyptian culture (61), flowing into Early Egypt (64), Middle Egypt (65), and Coptic Egypt (66).





Highlights of the collection including many great artifacts, but these are key pieces you'll find on display throughout these rooms: The Rosetta Stone (196 BC), Limestone statue of a husband and wife (1300 BC), Colossal bust of Ramesses II, the "Younger Memnon" (1250 BC), Colossal granite head of Amenhotep III (1350 BC), Colossal head from a statue of Amenhotep III (1350 BC), Colossal limestone bust of Amenhotep III (1350 BC), Fragment of the beard of the Great Sphinx (1300 BC), Mummy of 'Ginger' which dates to about 3300 BC, List of the kings of Egypt from the Temple of Ramesses II (1250 BC), Limestone false door of Ptahshepses (2380 BC), Granite statue of Senwosret III (1850 BC), Mummy of Cleopatra from Thebes (100 AD), Amarna tablets (1350 BC), and the Obelisk of Pharaoh Nectanebo II (360–343 BC)

Of these, I found the Rosetta Stone to be the crown jewel of this collection and the one I most wanted to see. Standing 45 inches (114.4 cm) high, 28.5 inches (72.3 cm) wide and 11 inches (27.9 cm) thick, and weighing in at 1,700 pounds (760 kg) – this stone tablet has had a sordid history, but if it weren't for its discovery modern humanity would be at a loss to understand the vast and rich histories and culture of the Ancient Egyptian civilization. Discovered by the French in the Egyptian Nile port-town of Rosetta in 1799, the stone consists of a single passage written in the three languages of the time: Egyptian hieroglyphs, demotic script, and classical Greek, which allowed British scientist Thomas Young and the French scholar Jean-François Champollion to decipher the principles of hieroglyphic writing.



The text on the stone itself is rather mundane – a decree from Ptolemy V (204–181 BC), describing the repeal of various taxes levied against temple priests of the day (as well as many other subjects) – but its importance to history and in comprehending the Egyptians is not. It is a treasure and one I am happy to say I have seen with my own eyes. Reading it, however, is more problematic, as I personally don't know any of the three languages presented on the tablet; thankfully, however, the British Museum published the translated text in 1981, which we find is about 1700 words in length in 20 paragraphs. An excerpt follows:

In the reign of the young one who has succeeded his father in the kingship, lord of diadems, most glorious, who has established Egypt and is pious towards the gods, triumphant over his enemies, who has restored the civilized life of men, lord of the Thirty Years Festivals, even as Ptah the Great, a king like Ra, great king of the Upper and Lower countries, offspring of the Gods Philopatores, one whom Ptah has approved, to whom Ra has given victory, the living image of Amun, son of Ra, PTOLEMY, LIVING FOR EVER, BELOVED OF PTAH, in the ninth year, when Aetos son of Aetos

was priest of Alexander, and the Gods Soteres, and the Gods Adelphoi, and the Gods Euergetai, and the Gods Philopatores and the God Epiphanes Eucharistos; Pyrrha daughter of Philinos being Athlophoros of Berenike Euergetis, Areia daughter of Diogenes being Kanephoros of Arsinoe Philadelphos; Irene daughter of Ptolemy being Priestess of Arsinoe Philopator; the fourth of the month of Xandikos, according to the Egyptians the 18th Mekhir.

DECREE. There being assembled the Chief Priests and Prophets and those who enter the inner shrine for the robbing of the gods, and the Fan-bearers and the Sacred Scribes and all the other priests from the temples throughout the land who have come to meet the king at Memphis, for the feast of the assumption by PTOLEMY, THE EVER-LIVING, THE BELOVED OF PTAH, THE GOD EPIPHANES EUCHARISTOS, of the kingship in which he succeeded his father, they being assembled in the temple in Memphis on this day declared:

Whereas King PTOLEMY, THE EVER-LIVING, THE BELOVED OF PTAH, THE GOD EPIPHANES EUCHARISTOS, the son of King Ptolemy and Queen Arsinoe, the Gods Philopatores, has been a benefactor both to the temple and to those who dwell in them, as well as all those who are his subjects, being a god sprung from a god and goddess like Horus the son of Isis and Osiris, who avenged his father Osiris, being benevolently disposed towards the gods, has dedicated to the temples revenues of money and corn and has undertaken much outlay to bring Egypt into prosperity, and to establish the temples, and has been generous with all his own means; and of the revenues and taxes levied in Egypt some he has wholly remitted and others has lightened, in order that the people and all the others might be in prosperity during his reign (...)

Other exciting pieces of the collection include Cleopatra's mummy (who doesn't know of the lust for power between Cleopatra, Caesar, and Anthony?), busts of Rameses II (often regarded as Egypt's greatest, most celebrated, and most powerful pharaoh; known as Rameses the Great), and shards of beard from the Great Sphinx (the colossal reclining statue featuring a human head believed to depict the pharaoh Khufu, who's reign was in Egypt's Old Kingdom from 2589 to 2566 BC. Amazing, amazing collection. It took all I could to tear myself away from it, but I found something just as compelling to lure me away – the Greco-Roman collections.



The Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, like its Egyptian department counterpart, has one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of Greco-Roman antiquities in the world. Over 100,000 objects are on display in these halls, beginning with the Greek Bronze Age (3200 BC) through to the reign of Roman Emperor Constantine I (4th century AD). In addition to artifacts from the Roman Empire and the Greek civilization, you'll also find the Cycladic, Minoan and Mycenaean cultures represented here.



Highlights of this collection include: Caryatid from the Erechtheion, an ancient Greek temple on the northern side of the Acropolis of Athens – a Caryatid is a sculpted female figure which serves as an architectural support, in place of a column or pillar, and supports an entablature upon her head; The Bassae sculptures, twenty-three surviving blocks of the frieze from the interior of the Temple of Apollo Epicurius; The Warren Cup, a silver Roman skyphos (drinking cup) featuring two representations of homoerotic acts; a Roman cameo glass vase known as the Portland Vase; The Discobolus of Myron, or the Discus thrower statue; various pieces from the Knossos Palace (also known as the Labyrinth); a bronze head of the Roman Emperor Augustus; elements from the Mausoleum at Halikarnassos and the Temple of Artemis at Ephesos (two of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World); and

last, but certainly not least, the Elgin Marbles, 17 figures from the east and west pediments, 15 of the 92 original Metope panels (depicting battles between the Lapiths and the Centaurs), as well as 247 feet (of an original 524 feet) of the Parthenon Frieze, horizontal marble relief's set above the interior architrave of the temple itself.



These were amazing. Simply marvelous!

Thousands of years of history under one roof; I enjoyed it fully.

Around noon time I decided to finally call it quits and find one of the café's within for a little bite to eat – I was ravenous – therefore, there were many other collections within the Museum that I did not have time to see. These are from the Department of the Ancient Near East, which include approximately 330,000 objects from the Mesopotamian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Sumerian, Persian, and Phoenician civilizations; and the Department of Asia, which include over 75,000



objects from the entirety of Asia, from Neolithic times up to the present day. Be that as it may, within the fabulous “Great Court” concourse, a number of artifacts from each were available on display, such as: a stela of the Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II (9th century BC), two heads of Pharaoh Amenhotep III (1400 BC), two Egyptian obelisks, a marble lion from Knidos in Asia Minor, an Anglo-Saxon cross-shaft dated to around the early 9th century AD, a pair of Chinese guardian figures, and a Hoa Hakananai’a statue from Easter Island (you know, “the heads”).

So, I found myself an Egg and Watercress sandwich (they’re so yummy!), a slice of Belgium Chocolate cake, and a Pepsi MAX (whatever that was... tasted the same to me) and tucked in under the great tessellated glass roof of the concourse. Nothing could have been better, I tell you.

Speaking of the roof, according to literature available on site, it’s the largest covered square in all of Europe, is bigger than a football field, and is made up of 4,874 unique steel members connected at 1,566 unique nodes and 1,656 pairs of glass windowpanes. The entire structure is larger than an American football field!

Following the meal I left the British Museum and fancied a try at Hyde Park Corner. I wanted to see Hyde Park just for the sake of seeing it, but also because an exhibit called the “Star Trek Experience” was on hand there... somewhere. Unfortunately by the time I arrived at Hyde Park Corner my feet hurt so badly I turned right round and went back Underground and returned here. Replications of the Starship Enterprise and/or people preaching on the corner would just have to wait, you know?

Sprawling out on my bunk has certainly helped the situation. It’s a good thing too – we’re off to find a Mail Boxes Etc (MBE) store to ship some of the items we’ve accumulated on our travels thus far (guidebooks and assorted things) as well as mail off postcards and letters to our friends and family. And after that our performance of Disney’s The Lion King down at Lyceum Theater in the West End is on. I can’t wait!

Until later...

Part 2 – The Lion King

*Nants' ingonyama bagithi baba
Sithi hu ngonyama
Ngonyama nengw'e bo
Mayibaboh ngonyama baba
Nants' ingonyama bagithi baba
Sithi hu ingonyama
Ngonyama nengw'e bo
Haa Khuzani bo bhek' iyagalela
Nants' ngonyama bakithi babo
Sithi hu ngonyama
Ngonyama... ngonyama
Ngonyama... ngonyama*



Ingonyama nengw' enamabala! We're back and we're riding high from our experiences with Mufasa, Simba, Nala and the rest of the Prideland gang. Give me a few moments to settle, get packed up for our departure tomorrow and I'll tell you about our experience with The Lion King tonight.

There. Although we're all still running high from a rather good performance of The Lion King Musical here at London's West End – their equivalent of the Great White Way (a.k.a Broadway) in New York City – I think I'm settled enough to continue with today's adventures and, of course, speak about tonight's performance.



The Lion King musical could be considered the crown achievement of Disney's musical banner, which first tested the performance waters with *Beauty and the Beast* – turning its famed animated feature into a full-fledged musical experience (and a fantastic one at that, by the way). After finding success with *Beauty and the Beast*, Walt Disney Theatricals in conjunction with Elton John & Tim

Rice (the duo that wrote the music and lyrics for the original animated film), Lebo M, Mark Mancina, Jay Rifkin, Hans Zimmer, Michael Curry (puppets) and Julie Taymor (costumes and direction), they set out to adapt one of Disney's most successful animated features to date – *The Lion King* – to greater success.

Released to theaters on June 15, 1994, the original film immediately gained acclaim; the film climbed the box office charts around the world creating a global phenomenon in the process. Its premise is relatively simple: a retelling of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* using anthropomorphic animals on the African Serengeti plains. The film immediately

struck a chord with its audience, allowing an animated film to reach the top of the box office charts world wide for the very first time.

The Lion King takes place on a swatch of the Serengeti plains known as the Pridelands, which are ruled over by Mufasa, benevolent king of his pride of lionesses. At the start of our story, a wise old mandrill named Rafiki anoints Simba, the newborn cub of Mufasa and his queen, Sarabi, and presents him to a gathering of animals at Pride Rock; they've all been summoned there by a thunderous roar from the lion king to witness the continuation of the royal line and to pay tribute to young Simba, as the next lion king. As the dust settles, and young Simba grows, Mufasa takes him around the Pridelands, teaching him about the "Circle of Life", the delicate balance between life and death affecting all living things, and how one day he, Simba, will be charged with protecting the Pridelands and this delicate balance from those who seek to tip it, such as those "slobbering, mangy, stupid poachers" - the hyenas.



The hyenas aren't the only party interested in tipping the balance, however. Simba's uncle Scar, who desires the throne and all its power for himself, places a most heinous plan into motion: to rid the pride of Simba, Mufasa's only male offspring. This plan is further perpetuated by a secret alliance with the hyenas, which eke out their living on the outskirts of the Pridelands within the shadowed place on the northern border where no one dares venture. Scar preys on Simba's ever growing sense of curiosity and tells the young cub about an elephant graveyard lying within that shadowy place. And knowing that Simba will disobey his father's wishes by going there, Scar arranges for a surprise in wait in the form of Shenzi, Banzai and Ed, three spotted hyenas ordered to kill him. The plan is thwarted when Mufasa rushes in at the last moment to save his son, and Nala, his son's companion (and future Queen).

Scar gains the loyalty of the hyenas by claiming that if he becomes king, they'll "never go hungry again". They acquiesce leadership to him; Scar tells the hyenas to kill Mufasa and Simba, thus establishing his plan of regicide. Later on, Scar lures Simba into the gorge while the hyenas create a wildebeest stampede. Alerted to the herd on the move by Scar, Mufasa races to rescue Simba from the stampede. He saves his son but is left clinging to the edge of a cliff, spent. When Mufasa calls out to Scar to help him, Scar flings Mufasa into the stampeding wildebeest below. Watching his father fall to his death, Simba panics, this allows Scar to convince him that his latest action of disobedience was responsible for

Mufasa's death. To atone for this, and to escape his mother's unforgiving wrath, Scar convinces Simba his only course of action is to "run, and never return". Simba flees from the Pridelands. Scar once again sends Shenzi, Banzai and Ed to kill Simba, but he escapes from their clutches. The hyenas never alert Scar to their failure, thus Scar informs the pride that he is ascending to the throne, as both Mufasa and Simba were killed in the stampede.

Meanwhile, Simba is found unconscious by Timon and Pumbaa, a meerkat-warthog duo who adopts and raises the cub. Simba has an interesting childhood with these two, learning new concepts ("Hakuna Matata; it means no worries") that go against all that he was taught, and for a while his life is fun and full. One day, after Simba has reached adulthood, he is discovered by Nala who left the Pridelands in search of help. Simba shows Nala around his home and the two begin to fall in love. Nala then tells him that Scar has turned the Pridelands into a barren wasteland; she asks Simba to return and take his rightful place as king, but Simba refuses. They feud and part, but Rafiki, the wise old mandrill from earlier, arrives and "knocks some sense" into Simba, further aided by Mufasa's presence in the stars pressing Simba to "remember who you are".



Once back at Pride Rock, Simba (with Timon, Pumbaa and Nala) is horrified to see its condition. After seeing Scar strike his mother, Simba announces his return with a snarl. Although shocked to see Simba alive, Scar has one last card to play: he tells the pride that Simba was responsible for Mufasa's death and corners him at the edge of Pride Rock. As Simba dangles over its edge, Scar whispers to Simba his secret: "I killed Mufasa". Enraged, Simba leaps up and pins Scar to the ground, forcing him to admit the truth to the Pride. Once known, a raging battle then ensues between the hyenas and the lionesses, which results in Simba cornering Scar. Begging for mercy, Scar blames the hyenas for Mufasa's death, but Simba orders Scar into exile. Scar, pretending to adhere to the rule, lowers his head to leave, but turns back to attack Simba, resulting in a final duel. Simba triumphs over his uncle by flipping him over the edge of Pride Rock. Scar survives the fall but finds himself surrounded by the now-resentful hyenas, which attack and devour him. The film concludes with the Pride Lands turning green with life again and Rafiki presenting Simba and Nala's newborn cub. The Circle of Life continuing...

And every moment of this glorious story is told on stage, and then some, with the help of ingenious puppetry, costumes, music and atmosphere.



The main theme of *The Lion King* is “the Circle of Life” and that is translated within the framework of the musical as things in perpetual motion. Pride Rock ascends out of the theater floor like a towering beacon, devices are left uncovered so we can see their workings as they float (or wheel) across the stage, characters are not merely dolls but a blend of performer and puppet, and even become the grasses, plants or other scenic elements as required. All the major

scenes from the movie are represented here – from the amazing Circle of Life sequence through to the final battle – and then some. And although certain licenses had to be taken into consideration to bring the animated story to life, one cannot dismiss the enormity of it all.

Beyond the joyous Circle of Life sequence that begins the show – as Rafiki sings, the sun rises behind her and two giraffes and a cheetah walk out onto the stage, shortly followed by a zebra, birds, antelope, and ostriches, as two elephants, more birds, a rhino and wildebeest walk through the aisles – many other segments of the musical touched my heart, such as: “The Lioness Hunt”, which depicts the lionesses of the pride on a hunt is wonderfully choreographed, taking advantage of the performer’s headdresses; “The Live in You”, a touching scene between Mufasa and Simba, whereby the King simply becomes Simba’s father for a moment; “The Stampede”, where Mufasa is killed is depicted in a multi-level forced-perspective motif, featuring regular costumed character on the lower level and a paper drum on top, creating an illusion so compelling it brings shivers down my spine; “Rafiki Mourns” shows the incredible loss to the pride, as the lionesses bellow out in sadness. The lionesses cry using a Japanese puppet mourning technique (called Bunraku) in which ribbons flow out of the eyes to symbolize tears. The moment those tears are shed I cannot help but join them; and “Endless Night / He Lives in You” depicting a lost Simba calling out to his father, and his father answering from the heavens. This amazing staging, which re-creates the Mufasa’s Ghost scene from the original animated film, is something to behold. Created with special lighting effects, the visage of Mufasa suddenly thrusts out of thin-air, assembled from multi-fractional pieces of flotsam by the cast and crew. The effect is spellbinding, as is the rest of the musical.

Having seen the musical once on tour in the United States, I was quite interested in taking it in amongst a real theater, specially designed for such spectacles, so tonight’s performance was to be a treat. I wish I could say the performance tonight was a knock-out; I simply just did not think so. Part of the consternation I felt could have partly been caused by the troubles we had actually getting to the Lyceum Theater to begin with. Maya had it all figured out that the theater was somehow near the Burlington Arcade, a historical shopping promenade just off the streets of Picadilly street near Green Park (the very same arcade we visited earlier in the week), so it stood to reason the theater would be quite easy to find. Not the case, as it turned out. The Green Park station, where we were directed to get off at, was .3 miles from the Arcade.

And, as it turned out, the theater was 1.1 miles from there, taking us through Piccadilly Circus, Leicester Square, Covent Garden, past the Royal Opera House to a block from Aldwych. To say we had an interesting journey on foot would be an understatement.

Needless to say, with dinner from yet another Italian restaurant weighing heavily upon us, and the twenty minute walk to do in fifteen minutes or less, we arrived just in time. Oh, not in time to be seated for the Circle of Life sequence. No. We got the singular privilege of watching the start of the show from the rear of the theater - that's where they let all the late arrivals congregate until an appropriate time to seat them was found. Being mad wouldn't even describe my feelings for the cock-up and unfortunately it bled over into and throughout the entire performance. One consolation: it just so happened that one of the big elephant characters entered the "Pridelands" through a door we were standing right next to, so we got a chance to be welcomed by him. Once the Circle of Life sequence came to a climax, the ushers sat us in the center of Row C - our choice seats.

The rest of the show progressed, as it should with only a few more minor quibbles. First, it was hard to get over the British accents within the characters - it just didn't sound right. Second, the portrayal of Scar was very badly done, in my opinion. The actor who played him didn't go through the mannerisms of the actor I saw in Tampa, nor did he really voice the character as I thought it should be voiced. It was really more or less a guy in a costume strutting around the stage saying his lines. There was no real feeling in them. Even his singing was bad. Zazu was another oddity. In the London Production it is the bird that is colored white and the actor painted in blue and black. Quite interesting to see Zazu devoid of color. It didn't work at all. During and just after Mufasa's death, the curtain came down and I thought the Intermission was coming (which would have been the best place for it, alas it wasn't)... there were some technical difficulties on the stage that required the stoppage of the show. It picked up again and went on with the Hakuna Matata sequence and then normal intermission. The second half seemed to get a lot better with the "One by One" sequence, and the portrayal of Rafiki that the actress did - spot on. Adult Simba was interestingly cast but his normal speaking voice was a bit too high. Adult Nala was spot on. She has a powerful singing voice and a lovely speaking voice that just enchanted you. Timon and Pumbaa were rather bland copies of the American version. Otherwise the show was at least descent and I had a good time. I guess that's all that matters.

I suppose though that being such a fan of the Lion King, I want it treated correctly and I felt that the performance I saw here in London was not done to perfection. But, it apparently worked for the audience so that is what counts. In either case, our laundry was brought up in our absence, so I'm now watching Cedric and Maya scramble to get their bags together for the transfer to Paris tomorrow. I'm all set; all I have to do tonight is relive London through my pictures, my log and my memories. I wonder... how will Paris's adventures compare with London's?

I can't wait to find out!
Paris, here we come!