

Discovery Trip To London - Université Populaire de Caussade - 2018

Thursday 10th May

It was a very early start for the ten intrepid adventurers from the Tarn et Garonne, with a 5am rendez-vous at Toulouse airport. But it was worth it to arrive at 10am in central London. The sun was glistening on the river Thames before us, as we had coffee and a cranberry muffin on the 7th floor of the **Tate Modern Art Gallery**, overlooking **St Pauls Cathedral** and the skyscrapers of the City, the financial heart of London.

After checking into our hotel (and practicing such well-learned phrases as 'Could we have another pillow, please?'), we took our first double decker bus and headed for tea and pies at **Gabriels Wharf**. From there we followed the river bank past the crowds at the **London Eye**, and over Westminster Bridge to the **Houses of Parliament** and **Big Ben**, which is currently not at its iconic London best owing to a multi-million pound restoration project.

From **Westminster Abbey**, we crossed **St James Park**, which was full of life and flowers and squirrels, and arrived at **Buckingham Palace**, just in time to see a Queens guard soldier, fur hat and all, being relieved of his duties by a colleague.

A short hop across **Green Park**, took us to the London Underground, and we caught our first tube back to our hotel, to freshen up before dinner in the **local pub**. Fish and Chips or Sausage and Mash, you can't get more English than that. With Sticky Toffee or Bread and Butter pudding to follow, we all went to bed feeling stuffed.

Friday 11th May

Our second London bus transported us to **20 Fenchurch Street** in the City of London. Known as the 'Walkie Talkie', this 38 floor building was constructed in 2014, and offers amazing 360 degree views of London from its tropical **Skygarden** and terrace.

A short walk past **All Hallows Church**, decorated with model ships in memory of sailors and people lost at sea, and on to a **River Bus** which conveyed us at top speed, the wind in our hair, down the Thames to **Greenwich**.

On our arrival we went directly to buy ourselves a picnic, and discovered the delights of **Marks and Spencer** supermarket, where our thrifty Tarn et Garonnais travellers filled their baskets with 3 for 2 sandwiches and snacks, and beautiful boxes of biscuits celebrating the royal wedding and baby. After a picnic in **Greenwich Park** in the English sunshine, we spent the afternoon exploring Greenwich; the **Royal Observatory** and the **Meridian Line**, the **Cutty Sark** (a 19th century tea ship which transported tea and other good around the world) and **Greenwich Craft Market**.

Back down the river on the boat, and a 15 minute walk back to the hotel, we barely had time to say 'WOW what a day!' and we were back on the streets of London on a Friday evening, on our way to dinner in Tas Turkish restaurant.

Saturday 12th May

Rain was forecast for our third day in London, but it didn't arrive until the afternoon, which allowed us to visit **Trafalgar Square** umbrella-free, with the **world's smallest police station**. An hour's dive into the **National Gallery** where we were blown away not just by the building but by the astonishing collection of art inside it, and up the road to **Piccadilly Circus**, whose adjoining streets were hung with Union Jacks for the royal wedding.

A stop in **Soho** for a sandwich and coffee, and on through the rain to the **British Museum**, where we saw, among other objects, the Rosetta Stone, used by Champollion to interpret the Egyptian hieroglyphs.

From historical artefacts we went to gastronomic excitements, by taking a tube to **Borough Food Market** to sample tea and stilton cheese, which we finished off in the pub with a pint and some pimm's, but not before a quick walk around **Southwark Cathedral**.

Dinner on Saturday night was in the **White Hart Pub**, where some fearless members of the group ate an enormous plate of English cold and cooked meat: black pudding, pork pies, pork scratchings, and Scotch eggs. I thought we were supposed to be eating a light meal tonight?!

Sunday 13th May

On Sunday we had a half a day before leaving to the airport for our return flight. We started the morning in **Highgate Cemetery**, a peaceful place with a profusion of trees and overgrown memorials. Our final stop could not have been a greater contrast; **Camden Market**, with its vast and eclectic collection of shops and stalls with their mixture of sights and sounds and smells.

After collecting our bags at the hotel, we headed off on the train to Gatwick airport and an early evening flight home. Arriving in Toulouse in the cold and pouring rain, the sun and the blue sky of London was a very happy memory, and one that will stay with us for many months to come.

Laetitia Lacey
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