



London and Royal Parks Marathon Trip Notes

October 9 - 18, 2014

Why again? I'm not so sure as I have never fully cared for London nor for the Brits and yet they do have the sights and museums and the idea of a run through the Royal Parks sounded good when it was proposed by Marathon Tours. You will see that my itinerary changed rather dramatically after arrival.

Something not to like? I noticed that I made some disparaging remarks about my last trip too. Yet those who know my past trip reports will remember that I try to give the Pros and Cons of any trip as I did for marathons. I've always disliked and distrusted the rosy everything-was-wonderful reports.

One big Disney World

I have the impression that Brits don't live in London and that it's primarily for tourists. Evidenced by the double digit £ millions of some apartments, it makes sense. I'd expected lots of veiled women but now I learn that they visit in the summer and primarily come to shop at Harrods.

It takes a challenge to find really 'old' in London too, as much of Westminster and the tourist sites were built around the same time that the United States was formed. Taking back-street walking tours helped.

A second epiphany

In January 2013 in California when I went for a marathon and cut out after the half, I vowed to quit marathons (well, mostly.) At this event I got another sign and have vowed to quit half-marathons (well, mostly.) Half way through I decided that I'd rather be touring; I was miffed at myself for:

- I paid to run? Like I needed a t-shirt?
- Wasting much of a morning on bib pick up.
- Standing around hours waiting for the start. Standing in porta potty lines.
- The course was what I'd walked multiple times anyway.
- One can't choose the weather and within a couple hours later it would have been awful.
- Lining up and being with a bunch of fat asses. If I want to walk, I need to hike instead.



So I peeled off, went back to the hotel for a second big luxurious breakfast, felt quite proud of myself, and went touring instead. I think that I just got my life back, or at least some extra time.

Hotel

St James Court is a historical building in a historical area and I stayed there in 2011 for the London Marathon. It was either owned by Crowne Plaza then or just changing, as it's now owned by the Taj chain. It's within a long stone's throw of Buckingham Palace and close to Victoria Station so it's in the heart of everything. It is either a special 4-star or a 5-star and I added to it by giving myself an

upgraded and larger room. A requirement in the land of tiny hotel rooms. Lovely, nearly perfect except for still being rather small and definitely one of the priciest hotels I've used. (I'm soon to go to Scotland and to Croatia so this got me prepped for high priced accommodations.)

Touring

With 9 nights in London, and having been there multiple times before, the pressure to see main sights was off. Lovely. That gave me the opportunity to see some really different and unique sights. I prided myself with not using the 'tube' except to get into town as why go underground with so much to see above, and why set out afield with so much nearby.

- Bloomsbury area in day and night time
- The British Museum with a guide
- Sherlock Holmes walking tour.
- Shakespeare's home and museum in Stratford. Can those two be any different!
- Warwick Castle, Cotswold and Oxford.
- Windsor Castle, Bath and Stonehenge
- Leeds, Canterbury and the White Cliffs of Dover
- Kensington walking tour of backstreets, Palace and Gardens.
- Sloan Road elegant and upscale shopping into Knightsbridge area.
- Old Westminster walking tour.
- Touring through three of their large gardens: Hyde Park, Green Park and St James Park.
- Tate Brit with three different tours with three different themes.
- Another tour on the river to see things differently.
- Walking across many of the bridges at least a few times each.

What did I miss? Amazingly a lot!

I'd had a big list and some of them were put off due to the heavy rain, and one of the tours got canceled at the last minute. If I return, I'll look to follow more of Georgiana, the Duchess of Devonshire's homes, Blenheim Palace (largest of all), Evening Song in a chapel, the new British Library, and an evening pub tour or two, afternoon tea in a major hotel (if I hit the lottery as they start in the \$40 range and go up precipitously from there), and if I've managed everything else, Shakespeare's Globe (a re-creation not even on the original site.) No, I did not go on the London Eye as all this was Disneyesque enough as it was.

Pictures? Not sure I'm going to take the time to add them. There are NO pictures of me and the sights are all on the internet anyway. Not to mention the fact that I'm a few trip reports behind. One can't come home for 2 days and get it all done.

Daily missives sent home

Friday - first full day in London

Fortunately the Thursday flight to London was uneventful. I've never taken a day flight but I managed to utilize the lie flat bed anyway. I had almost 2 hours of sleep which of course made it more difficult to fall asleep once I got into London in the evening.

In 2011 I was here at the same hotel in honor of running the famous London Marathon. That marathon is practically as crazy as the one in France through the Vineyards called the Medoc Marathon. It is only followed by the New York City Marathon known as one big long block party. I am here for the Royal Park's (half) marathon but I have no indication that they will be in costume like they do for the London Marathon. I will not be in costume as I gave up the liberty lady crown a couple of January's ago.

Hotel - Last year this tour company stayed in the Intercontinental which had interested me. This year they are back again in the Saint James Court Hotel which is near to Buckingham Palace. This is the same place I stayed and I was very happy with it then but I have gotten more spoiled so I got a slightly larger upgraded room and now have a nice sitting area and desk. This is a historic building and the courtyard that my sixth floor room looks out onto is quite special as are the surrounding buildings.

Fortunately the luscious breakfast goes on until 11 AM because I didn't even get into the hotel until close to midnight nor settle down until after 1 AM.

Been there done that - There is something very special out about being at a place where you are not pressed to see all the main sites. Again.

So I chose a walking tour today called "In the footsteps of Sherlock Holmes". If you are guessing, you are correct, that I know nothing about Sherlock Holmes and after the tour I am convinced that as much as I liked the walking tour that I will probably not be reading any of the books. The write up says "grab your deerstalker and magnifying glass because the game is afoot. We're going sleuthing. Explore London with the ever changing kaleidoscope up life intrigued by Holmes and Watson following their adventures in Charing Cross, the Strand's gas-lit alleys and Covent gardens. Ending in a place where a dream becomes a reality, the superb re-creation of Sherlock homes study in the very building immortalized in the hound of Bakersfield." The Sherlock Homes Pub.

To get there I spent about two hours walking through various parks to include the lovely St. James Park. To come home I went by Big Ben and Westminster Abby. And the crowds. Wow what crowds and so many Asian people like little bugs swarming.

For the evening with the company I have come with, had a cocktail reception filled full of food, and drink, and good company. I like their leader Jacqui a lot. I might go to Easter Island with her in June.

Big plans for tomorrow. We shall see if the body holds up.

From Judy re Sherlock Holmes and how few of us have watched or read of him: Some of what I do know surprisingly comes from a TV show called HOUSE that I used to watch starring the British actor Hugh Laurie as an AMERICAN doctor (his American accent is so perfect, you'd never know he's British). Anyway I was surprised to I learn that Dr. Gregory House's grumpy rumpled irritable genius character was based on Holmes. Get it, Holmes/House? His kindly doc friend James is similar in character to Watson. I'm going to copy Tom, Marv and Maryanne, in case they ever watched the show and see if they're aware that it was based on Holmes. Of course Dr. House is a doc, but he solves medical mysteries that no one else can figure out. And sure enough:
http://house.wikia.com/wiki/Gregory_House_and_Sherlock_Holmes_connections

From Tom, agreeing with Judy: I remember the show and I thought he and the cast were really good. I didn't know though, that his character had any relation to Sherlock. I've always liked him and admired his ability and remember some old comic stuff he did that was absolutely hilarious. And speaking of Sherlock Holmes, have you seen the PBS Masterpiece Mystery series of the same name. The lead character Benedict Cumberbatch (no, I'm not kidding, this is his real name). Wonderful young actor and plays this part perfectly. Won a Tony recently. His Doctor Watson is also perfectly cast. If you haven't seen it I think you can google and see some. They're excellent and of course set in London.

Saturday and into Sunday in London

Weather is what you expect. Brits would be covered with moss or mold were it not for the intermittent sunshine. Yesterday I walked out in the rain and was grateful for my new Patagonia rain/wind coat. I buttoned up. I hooded up. Yet within a quarter hour I was shedding the coat. Today is the same and it reminds me of living in Belgium for five years where the moss grows on both sides of the tree and summer falls on one day late July - for only one day.

I walked nearly 1 1/2 hours to the British Museum for a guided walking tour. That after walking 45 minutes each way to pick up bib and t-shirt for Sunday's half marathon. I just can't think of going underground with so much of interesting things happening on the street.

So I well deserved a pint of Guinness at the Shakespeare Head Pub, don't you think? It sure helped the tired legs. It seemed to be filled with locals and it was only lunchtime.

Getting to the British Museum was an experience. I went down Charing Cross Road again having gone through Trafalgar Square and by the National Museum still again. Crazy busy in part because the square contained an African type festival with great music. The roadway on my walk was full of antique book stores galore. Covent Gardens is now more like a craft festival than the old food market it used to be. But then I got into a quieter area sure I was lost and quite certain that I didn't want to be lost there. Chinatown going into the University area probably is where one does not want to walk alone at night. I took a circuitous route but not by choice which meant a little farther to the British Library. Ended in Kings Cross after going through Bloomsbury and then going home I managed some side streets only for pedestrians and lined with restaurant and bar goers. They stand in the streets so they can smoke. It was like a Greenwich Village.

On the way, off my local St James Park and on the edge of Green Park I'd tried to find the old home of Diana, Duchess of Devonshire, but I missed the right street area and was on a timetable. So much to see, so little time, but fortunately I have quite a few days. I'll need them.

The walking tour of the British Museum was right up my alley. I got in there at around 1 o'clock and the tour started at 2 o'clock. By 5 o'clock my legs felt like rubber and yet I wanted them to revive sufficiently so I could do the 7:15 PM historical pub tour. No one should believe that I thought I would do a half marathon in the morning. My logic would get the best of me and I would give up the evening tour. That turned out not to be the best decision though when I finally arrived home and in bed by 11pm it seemed to be. More on that decision and the half marathon coming up.

This museum has been the same since the mid-1800s excepting for the new covering and having removed the library to a new location. They only added what they called the Great Court, the largest covered square in Europe, and it is something like the glass pyramid covering the Louvre. Dramatic. After understanding the Rosetta Stone (which looks like nothing special) I felt better about it, and I got a reasonable explanation about the Elgin marbles "stolen" from Athens and why they will NOT return them. (Athens built a state-of-the-art place for their return, which place remains empty with the explanation that London won't return them. I saw their purpose built spot in Athens at a lovely new museum at the base of the Parthenon hill a couple years ago.) So many treasures that I would have walked right by had I not had a lecturer who understood and loved them so much. But done is done. On my feet from 9 am to 5pm was a lot. I suspect it is like for the Louvre or the Metropolitan Museum of Art in that you can spend many days and not see it all. I tried.

So I found a little Italian restaurant - really little teeny down an alley way called Bury road, as in cemetery. I later learned that El Castelletto was just what it felt like: A family run little jewel. <http://www.yelp.co.uk/biz/il-castelletto-london>. Well I don't typically look for pasta dinners before a marathon, but this sounded right for my depleted body. But then what would happen but this little family's restaurant got inundated with three loud (in all ways) girls who looked like hookers along with

two guys who looked like two customers. Later a third guy who fit right in showed up. I'm sure these girls mothers have no idea how they are dressed. I am primarily of the old-school that believes they have already said "yes".

Side note: Did you see the new California law that says yes means yes? As I read it, these poor boys can get lead on until the last moment and then have to ask for sure if she really means yes. This is women's power to the extreme. Where is a balance!

Notes on Prices: Always a surprise and were the GBP be equal to dollars the prices would be fine. But we pay \$1.70 for 1 GBP. So wines are 7 and 8. Pints are 5 and 6. Those are GBP not dollars.

Sunday morning

I was up at 6 for a 7 o'clock breakfast and an 8:15 departure. (Others left at 7 and 7:30am.) After a slow walk due to traffic diversions, I arrived before the 9am start but little did I know that my wave would not start before 9:40.

Amusants.

- Long toilet lines until they came along with a bullhorn and told us there were lots of toilets along the line up and to please move on. We did. There weren't. Well, they were there, but their lines were worse. Then someone came along and said there were more toilets around the corner with no line. There weren't.
- I gave it up and lined up with an embarrassing group of runners/walkers. Fat asses, cripples, and even Tony the Tiger. I mean real fat asses. They should be my heroes just to have gotten out of bed and made the effort let alone going 13.1 miles plus the 2 or 3 to get there.
- I carried-on by following the 2:40 pacer and we traversed not beautiful parks but at most the roads along the two parks I know well and unsettling that I'd finally figured out that we were to be routed to wind twice around Hyde Park.
- Well almost 2 years ago I had an epiphany on the California coast at a trail marathon and decided to give up marathons. Mostly. Today I looked around me and realized how much stupid dead time I was taking just to run a few iffy miles at an event that no longer looked impressive from where I was standing and decided to just go home. Home to the luxury hotel with the lush breakfast of which I'd indulge.
- Don't get me wrong. I know there are some good athletes out there but marathoning where I can now view it has become quite a different scene. It is not that I don't admire the fat asses for getting out there; maybe they will get healthier. I just don't care to pay up so much in time and money for the continued experience. Been there. Done that. It's not the same. I don't exactly need another t-shirt or medal as I have at least my 100 marathons plus more.
- So the big joke is on me. I used up much of my morning for about 30 minutes of running and 2 1/2 hours of walking to and fro or standing around with an unimpressive group. Amusing.
- Maybe I'll go to the old Tate museum until the next good sounding walking tour. Tomorrow will likely be out of town though I have mixed emotions doing that since there is so much to do in London.

Note on the Muslims: On prior trips the women in veils and even burkas were everywhere. Oddly I've seen very few. I wonder where they are. I have seen a true infestation of Asians. Some are sweet looking cute little folks but more and more they are taking over the Ugly American mantle.

The mystery of the bees: We might have lost them in America but they are here and well. Something odd has happened that they seem attracted to me. In a store a shopkeeper became alarmed, told me to stand still and removed one from my hair. In the park I had to swat two away. This morning at the marathon start a young gal told me to stand still and shoed one off my neck. Maybe they like my Mme. Rochas. Tom will kindly say that I'm just 'sweet' but after the above rant, we know better.

Starting Sunday after the aborted marathon

It is clear by my emails that I have more mature friends - smile - as evidenced by all the congratulatory notes I got for having pulled out of the marathon and becoming a tourist again.

On behalf of the marathon I can say that the weather was wonderful and thank heavens that the heavy rains and winds of late afternoon didn't happen during the marathon. They did happen toward the end of my walking tour and despite having wonderful rain gear windbreaker, I was very chilled and wet.

I often thought there must be more to old Westminster than all the tourist that hang around like little ants. The main tourist section is just packed shoulder to shoulder and not very nice at all. But sure enough there is another area and after about 20 minutes of our walking tour in the crowded section we got into totally empty old side streets.

From the walking tour brochure: "*1,000 years of history. This is the cornerstone, the Seminal London walk. Miss it and you've missed London. For old Westminster is London at its grandest; the place where kings and queens were crowned, where they lived, and often were buried. It is the forge of the national destiny, the place where the heart of the Empire beat, the Mecca of politicians throughout the ages. The past here is cast in stone and we take it all in; ancient Westminster Hall, the houses of parliament, the jewel tower, and Westminster Abby. And to see it with a great guide is to have that pass suddenly rise to the surface.... Like seen a photographic print come up in a dark room. It doesn't get any better, an embarrassment of riches. We will also explore the private face of Westminster - The London equivalent of Georgetown. Unlike the tourist hordes, will get to see the hidden and ever so picturesque Georgian back streets where all the political salons are.*" I think the guide might have been a Shakespearean actor. We were very entertained.

Then I was going to go on another evening walking tour called SoHo Unzipped. Another pub walking tour but this one was not to be inside of pubs. So the rain and winds and floods disrupted that and instead I got onto a Thames River tour boat. That after a long walk along the waterway and underneath the London eye and into a huge palace/castle affair that was a Marriott hotel where the bar's window over looked the river to one side and the London eye on the other. That was a nice stop off and a way to check email but the 9 GBP glass of wine would translate to almost \$13. (Everything is outrageously expensive in London.).

I've had my fish and chips and thought it was absolutely wonderful and probably one of the most reasonably priced things I've had at something under 10 GBP.

My effort for tomorrow was going to tour Windsor Castle but it was not to be as tickets are sold out. The economy looks pretty good to me.

Instead I am heading to Leeds Castle and to get there we go through Greenwich, home of the famous Cutty Sark and the Royal Observatory. Some say that Leeds Castle is the loveliest and most magical castle in the world and it is set in the middle of a natural lake - but we shall see. I have seen a lot of castles and palaces. Supposedly we get in for a private tour before the doors open to the public.

The main reason I'm going is because the ultimate destination is Canterbury Cathedral which takes us through Kent which is also called the garden of England. I've been in the Kent area and I don't remember that. Before coming home late in the evening we drive by the White Cliffs of Dover which I do well remember because we used to take the ferry from Belgium's Ostend into England and we landed in the White Cliffs of Dover.

Oops. Scratch that. I'm now on the wait list for maybe Wednesday. Instead I'm heading to the medieval Warwick Castle. I don't know that I'm too happy about seeing a place of bloody battles and where there are gruesome dungeons and prisoners were tortured. But we also get to go to Stratford upon Avon where William Shakespeare was born and lived and then onward with a drive through the Cotswolds which is said to be one of the most scenic areas of England with charming villages and thatched roof cottages. The ultimate destination is Oxford College dating back to the 13th century. Just think, Oxford has in common Harry Potter scenes and where Bill Clinton was a student. It too will be a long day.

Odd that the Bath and Stonehenge tours are also sold out. I heard mention on the radio that a main newspaper (NY Times?) just wrote that they couldn't understand why anybody wanted to see a bunch of rocks. Or why bother to see Bath.

Oh well.

Comment on fly over tours

I find them to be primarily for the bragging rights. Getting tickets punched. "Oh yeah I've been there. See my t-shirt". One sees more highways or train insides than not. My visit to Windsor Castle was almost criminal for the lack of time allotted. I made a mistake by computing entry ticket and train ticket prices and noting that a guided bus tour was similar price. Yet far too short to properly see the doll house, state rooms and chapel in two hours.

So why me? Reason for these bus tours

It started that I wanted to tour Windsor castle. It was blowing wind and rain and I was getting shriveled up like a prune so why not get on a bus to a castle and stay dry? I signed up but it was full so I reserved the following day. But it was still wet and ugly outside so I tried for one more day bus trip. It was later found to be sold out too but in the meantime I'd gotten emotionally attached to the idea of seeing each location. And getting off the soggy streets. Thus more than one bus tour.

Wow, but I've been here many times years ago when we lived nearby, then in the 80s for touring in conjunction with Koi Shows and visits to hobbyists homes. Then the time for the London Marathon when I amazed myself for getting so much done. Yet I must come back. I have far too long of a list to see it all. I guess the more you see, the more you learn is left to see.

England and especially London are not and never have been my favorite locations by a long shot. But one can't dismiss the history. There is traffic everywhere. Tourists like the busiest ever seen in Times Square. And the Brits are either young and funky or old and matronly with not a lot in between.

Late Wednesday Update and Misc Notes

I have now taken three rather long day trips, all in a row. Each were really what I call flyovers and each were 12 to 15 hour days. All three of them not only gave me a destination to brag about (smile) but also revealed new areas of London that we drove through either picking people up at their hotels or on our way out either westerly or easterly. My list of things I want to see has increased rather dramatically. I only have 2 ½ more days

Tuesday I got my Windsor Castle trip done. It was really rather criminal because we had so little time at Windsor Castle before we went to Bath and at Bath we had so little time that was criminal. We did tour their museum and the Roman baths and I drank some of their mineral water which gave me enough energy to go walk along the river. Then indulging in a pint at a little old traditional looking pub. I would like to find a way to go back to the city of Bath. The opulence of the city and the surrounding homes surprised me as did the fact that it sits on a number of hills whereas much all of the UK that I have seen is pretty flat.

Windsor Castle is a bit Disneyesque; it did have the most dramatic state rooms I can remember seeing. (All in what I think of as Brit style – I must be more into the French than I realized.) It also had a dollhouse at 1:12 size that was made for one of the Queen's before she grew up (Elizabeth?). Donations from artists and companies allowed for it to have the most amazing replicas including real bottles of wine, a working sewing machine, vacuum cleaner, all electrified, artwork recreated in miniature, etc. and truly decadent.

Then we went to Stonehenge. It didn't need very much time. Stonehenge doesn't take very long. It is hard to figure out and there isn't very much there but the more you hear about it the more amazing is the mystery of how it was made five thousand years ago. I'll add some Stonehenge facts at the end.

Amusants

- A Bentley pulled up beside our bus while I was looking for Wi-Fi and there was a Bentley personal Wi-Fi___33. That's style. By the way, there are lots of Bentleys and Rolls and Aston Martins here. Especially in the Kingsbridge area.
- Brits are overtaking Parisians for being rude.
- Asians are overtaking Americans for being ugly. Spending. Picture taking. Late. Arrogant.
- Brits might not be as fat as Americans but they sure are overtaking them for being frumpy.
- Hotel breakfast was something in the \$35 range. Some days I made it worthwhile. I love being back in the land of Bircher muesli <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muesli> and this hotel had tiny loaves of banana bread that I've never tired of yet and I managed to down a few a day.
- I got my favorite tour guide on second and third day. Frumpy and abrupt but really with good commentary. She was willing to abandon a continuously late-to-the-bus Asian at Bath. I'm surprised everyone on the bus didn't applaud except that many of them had been late too. No one was late again.
- There are more Pret A Manger than McDonald's which are not short in supply either.
- Odd how we can be set among some lovely old architecture but with far too many new modern and incredibly ugly buildings. Reminds me of Berlin. As I think of it, the damage from the war could be the cause.
- Evidence that many only want the headlines of a visit: the tour company offers the tours MINUS entry. Our bus tours had those who went and those who went IN. It reminds me of an aunt who when visiting us when we lived in Europe said "I don't do museums".

London - love it or hate it.

In this weekend's newspaper called the independent was an article entitled "London is expensive, crowded and frantic – and how we love to hate it" and subtitled "The city is the grimy, gritty, grumpy face we show to the world." Then there is an article in the Guardian speaking of how Britain's are the unhappiest and loneliest people in Europe. Maybe this is because they don't have any sun.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/london-is-expensive-crowded-and-frenetic--and-how-we-love-to-hate-it-9788394.html>

From a good friend who knows England well: This article about the "Age of loneliness" seems to feel right. Britain is the loneliest of Countries. The article is not fun, but it thought provoking. And makes me feel privileged. For people like us who have great lists of interest, there's no such thing as loneliness. See:

<http://click.mail.theguardian.com/?qs=608c2cf7170ec25ee4d398fbc1e2dacbc179ee91663ec2812a62d6c772e848a1>

We almost had a glimmer of sun for a little while today. It didn't last but I have hopes for part of tomorrow.

Rest up

Three days in a row getting up at 6am and then getting in at 9pm has made me decide to give up my walking tour in the morning and have a little bit of a lie in.

Soon - Airport transport

I've got to figure this out for my Saturday evening return to the airport. I was told that the Heathrow Express was the way to go but I thought it was awfully pricey at 21 pounds for a 15 minute ride (after a 20 minute walk.) It turns out that it is even pricier because it only takes you to Paddington and from there you connect to the tube. Hopefully you get on the right tube because you have already negotiated too heavy flights of stairs both up and down and that with your suitcase and duty-free liquor. But there are two tracks, one in front of you and one behind, and if you get on the wrong track that meant getting off at the next station and negotiating two more big flights of stairs with suitcases in hand - both up and down. Then when you exit the tubes it is the right one but there's another flight of stairs and then about three blocks over cobblestone to your hotel. I don't want to do all that again. I have heard there is a door to door bus which I am going to investigate. However, I will figure out the tube and the express and risk the above again well before I will pay 90 pounds for a friggin' taxi.

Facts on Stonehenge

From how the colossal stones were transported to the reasons why it was built, Stonehenge, on Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire, is shrouded in mystery. Here are five things we do know about the Neolithic stone circle. Or at least, five things we think we know...

- 1) *Stonehenge is over 5,000 years-old, with construction beginning on the first stage of the monument c3100 BC. It is older than all the pyramids of Egypt. The design would be changed, with stones added and removed, over the next 1,500 years.*
- 2) *The monument is made of two major types of stone, sarsens and bluestones. Sarsens are the larger ones, some of them reaching 9m tall and weighing over 20 tons. They are thought to have come from the Marlborough Downs, around 20 miles from Salisbury Plain, and were transported on large logs greased with animal fat. The volcanic bluestones – so called because they have a bluish hue when they get wet – had a longer journey. Weighing around three to four tons, they were brought from the Preseli Hills in Wales – over 150 miles away. There have been several theories explaining how they were moved, including boats, glaciers and even aliens, but the new research might get us closer to the answer...*
- 3) *The research was carried out by teams from Aberystwyth University, University College London and National Museum of Wales. They claim over half of the bluestones have been traced to a specific part of the Preseli Hills called Carn Goedog, rather than the outcrop where they were originally thought to come from, Carn Meini. But what does this mean? It is highly unlikely that the stones were moved to Wiltshire using rafts on the Bristol Channel as Carn Goedog is on the other side of the hills from the waterways. Theories of alien intervention may yet gain more traction after this revelation.*

4) *The purpose of Stonehenge's existence is another hotly debated issue as records are so sparse from the time of its construction. It may have been used as a memorial to commemorate leaders of the nearby tribes; a site of miracle healing; a burial ground; or an astronomical observatory to mark the winter solstice. Whatever its purpose, it was built with a sophisticated understanding of mathematics and geometry, as it is aligned with the rising and setting of the Sun.*

5) *There are several replicas of Stonehenge around the world including the Maryhill Stonehenge in Washington State, USA. It was built by a road builder called Sam Hill as a memorial to the victims of World War I. The Esperance Stonehenge in Australia is a full size replica of the original, while Stonehenge Aotearoa in New Zealand is designed to be an astronomical observatory for the Southern Hemisphere. And then there is Carhenge in Nebraska, USA, featuring 38 cars rather than stones to make the triliths.*

Also see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stonehenge>

Thursday gave me a long walk through Hyde Park, Sloan Square and Road, Knightsbridge, and into Kensington where I had a delightful walking tour of this exclusive area. Here is from the walking tour description:

This one's special. *It's rarely the first – or even the second or third – walk people go on, but when they do get round to taking it, they often say it's the one they liked the most. And no wonder, because Royal Kensington is London at its best – picturesque, stimulating, and full of character. Its parts are as delightful as London can provide: everything from warmly handsome old Kensington Palace, home to the Cambriges (and the late Diana, Princess of Wales) to Kensington Gardens (all meadows, shaded walks, bowers, and flower gardens, it might be the grounds of a stately home in some rural shire) to cobbled little soigne lanes and mews, girt with pretty cottages and charming old shops; and from millionaires' row and regal avenues to beautifully kept squares and a clutch of the world's greatest museums; let alone [the garden in the sky \(the largest and most breathtaking roof garden in Europe\)](#)*; the secluded town house of the greatest Londoner of the 20th-century, an American president's flat, the most astonishing small literary house in the world, acres of gentility, a secret trap-door into a hidden world, and more history and colourful characters than you can shake a stick at. Guided by [Adam](#) or [David](#). *You want breathtaking – [here's](#) a nonpareil pen portrait of the Roof Garden.*

I continued the walk through the museum section, first the Natural History Museum and then into the Victoria and Albert Museum with its weird collection of everything important in the world and all hodge podge. The café was a special delight because I needed a drink and a sit down. It took me forever to walk home and that was since the streets are rarely properly marked. A Square? I need to know the street NAME! But as friend Ellen would say: Some of my best adventures have been when I was lost.

Missed: Queen visits ceramic poppies at the Tower of London - I saw the poppies flowing out the Tower from the bus when returning from one of my day trips, but missed the recent happening of the Queen tripping through the tulips -- oops, poppies. Didn't go. Was at Tower of London in earlier days and



then again when I was here for the marathon, so decided to skip it this time as it's a very long walk away. I prided myself in investigating my area as well as I could and never getting on the tube after coming in from the airport. *The Queen and her husband the Duke of Edinburgh have visited a World War One art installation at the Tower of London. They installation features thousands of ceramic poppies. Each one represents the life of a British or Colonial soldier who died during World War One. By Armistice Day, the day that we remember those who fought in World War One, there will be 888,246 ceramic poppies*

outside the Tower of London. The Queen helped lay a wreath of poppies at the installation. The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, and Prince Harry visited earlier this year.

Itinerary

Thu Oct 9

9:10am Depart Newark EWR via UA#922R
9:20pm Arrive London Heathrow LHR

Hotel St James Court Hotel London – 9 nights
54 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E6AF Tele 011 44 207 834 6655
www.stjamescourthotel.co.uk

From website: Located minutes from Buckingham Palace, 51 Buckingham Gate, Taj Suites and Residences is a five star hotel exuding luxury in prestigious surroundings. A Taj hotel that features signatures of excellence including butler service, the Michelin starred Quilon Restaurant, sister to the famous Bombay Brasserie, a stunning award-winning Courtyard garden with delightful fountain as well as the grand banqueting facilities of its Private Rooms at Buckingham Gate and the exclusive Spa at 51. With 85 contemporary suites from one to nine bedrooms, including the Jaguar Suite, a Cinema Suite, a Prime Ministers Residence and the Presidential Floor, all Suites offer a separate living room, fully equipped kitchen and luxurious bathroom, 51 Buckingham Gate offers an ideal home away from home experience for the discerning traveller.

*From booking.com: With a luxury spa and tranquil courtyard garden, St. James' Court, A Taj Hotel, London features 4-star rooms, free Wi-Fi and 3 restaurants. Buckingham Palace is just over a quarter mile away and Victoria station is a **10-minute** walk away. The spacious, elegant rooms at St James' Court have flat-screen TVs and luxurious beds. All rooms have air conditioning, free Wi-Fi, minibars and modern bathrooms with fluffy bathrobes and slippers. The Spa at 51 features a sauna, steam room and solarium, and a fitness suite with personal trainers. Guests can also relax in the beauty center, which offers an indulgent treatment menu. St James' Court also features the Michelin-starred Quilon restaurant and the stylish, award-winning Zander Bar. Bistro 51 serves fresh European cuisine and Bank Westminster offers a modern British menu. The St James' Court is a **10-minute** walk from Victoria Coach and train stations, offering access to the Gatwick Express. The Houses of Parliament and Big Ben are only a **10-minute** walk away.*

Yes: WiFi in the room and free; Coffee, cookies and bottled water in the room and free; and a mini-bar

Tube stop St James Park (Circle and District Lines) or
Victoria Station (Circle, District and Victoria Lines)

Airport trans From Heathrow, the London Underground (Piccadilly Line) serves Heathrow. The St James Park stop (Circle Line) is two blocks from the St James Court Hotel (which is only five blocks from Victoria Station.) Cost is 5.50 GBP for regular trains and 21.00 GBP for the Heathrow Express. Heathrow Express departs the airport every 15 minutes to Paddington Station and only takes 20 minutes. From Paddington Station you can take the Tube or a taxi to the hotel. The Underground takes 50 minutes.

Host: Jacqui Kaufman with Marathon Tours
Emergency: Marathon Tours office 617 242 7845 or outside office hours
Jacqui cell 303 842 5700. She is at St James Court from Oct 9-13.

Fri Oct 10

3:30pm Training Run with Jacqui meeting in the hotel lobby

6:00pm Welcome reception to 7:30pm at St James Court in the Taj Room on 1st Floor

Sat Oct 11

9:45am Meet Jacqui in the hotel lobby to walk to the pick up area together. Or:
10am to 4pm Race Pack pick up at Hyde Park – a short walk.

Check if hotel is offering a pasta dinner. Recommendations include:
Colosseo Italian Restaurant www.colosseorestaurant.co.uk

Zizzi Ristorante by Victoria Station www.zizzi.co.uk/venue/index/victoria

Il Posto Ristorante <http://ilpostovictoria.co.uk/>

Sun Oct 12

6:00am Breakfast available at hotel

7:30am Meet Jacqui in the hotel lobby to walk to the start together. Or:

9:00am Race start – a short walk from the hotel of about .75 mile.

<http://royalparkshalf.com/>

What's it all about?

On a sunny October morning in 2013, 16,000 people ran 13.1 miles through central London, taking in the spectacular sights of the capital and the beautiful Royal Parks for our biggest Royal Parks Foundation Half Marathon to date. Around 40,000 spectators and supporters joined us to cheer on the runners, enjoy the Food & Fitness Festival and soak up the lovely autumnal sunshine.

An amazing experience

In 2008 we created a spectacular Half Marathon in central London – the first and only one of its kind. The stunning 13.1 mile route takes in the capital's world-famous landmarks on closed roads – Buckingham Palace, London Eye, Houses of Parliament and the Royal Albert Hall – and four of London's eight Royal Parks – Hyde Park, The Green Park, St James's Park and Kensington Gardens. We, like all of our runners, want to see the best of London's city and parks, and so we build a fantastic event that goes beyond just running 13.1 miles, and design the day so that spectators can have as much fun as the runners themselves.

Park festival activities continue until 4pm

6:00pm Runners gather at Albert Pub for post-race celebration – at own expense.

A 3-minute walk from hotel at corner of Buckingham Gate and Victoria Street

Rest of trip ideas:

London Walks and day trips at <http://www.walks.com/> (linked from our favorite Paris Walks).

World's 10 Best Spots for Afternoon Tea | Fodors

<http://www.fodors.com/news/photos/worlds-10-best-spots-for-afternoon-tea>

Sat Oct 18

4:00pm Depart London Heathrow LHR via United #111S

7:20pm Arrive Newark EWR

<http://www.501places.com/2011/04/10-reasons-why-people-hate-london/>

http://www.walks.com/London_Walks_Home/Dont_Want_to_Walk/default.aspx

When you're in London, do see if you can get a tour of Spencer House on Green Park, just down the hill from the Ritz Hotel. It's now owned by the Rothschilds, who have beautifully restored several rooms (while Diana Spencer - Princess Diana - was alive). Georgiana was also a Spencer and it was her mother and father who bought that house. Georgiana's in town house was up on Piccadilly, across and kitty-cornered from the Ritz (now torn down.)

Imagine having her mother that close! Just down the hill. If you remember, her mother was a terrible nag, always making her wrong and telling her what to do and how to act. But the restoration is really beautiful and worth seeing.

I'm so enamored of London Walks I can't imagine giving up the intimate details of the walks. I remember a night pub-crawl that included a pub called "The Fox", named after Charles James Fox, the politician that Georgiana supported. The day trips out of town by train are also excellent.

Here are two more suggestions:

Go to the Ceremony of the Keys. It's free. It's the nightly ceremony when they lock up the tower of London. It's a time machine! Here's a link to instructions of how to get tickets:

<http://www.hrp.org.uk/TowerOfLondon/WhatsOn/theceremonyofthekeys>

And if you have time, see the Wallace collection. It's a museum in Hertford House, Manchester Square, London. Google Wallace Collection London and you'll find a lot of information. I remember the best Bouchers I've ever seen and a portrait by Gainsborough of Mary Robinson (Perdita). I was struck by the explanatory note. She was an actress. The prince fell in love with her and wanted her for his mistress. She did NOT want this honor because she knew he would not marry her and would eventually leave her and her reputation would be ruined. He persisted. She negotiated an agreement. If and when he left her, he was to present her with a relatively large sum of money that would carry her through the rest of her life. Prinney (friend of Georgiana's) got her to consent and when he left her, he did NOT keep his word. She was forced into poverty and became a writer to earn a living. She became a very popular writer and kept hounding him for the money he owed her. That's why he nick-named her "Perdita". She was supporting her sick mother and herself as her health deteriorated. Her earnings were not enough and all of her worldly goods were sold at public auction to pay debts and still Prinney did not come through with the money he promised her.

If I ever become outrageously rich, one of the things I'd like to do is find her grave and build her a very large monument for surviving the disgusting male chauvinism of the 18th century. Prinney was a piece of dog-shit in my eye. But he got his. He was forced to marry Caroline of Brunswick, fat, sloppy and he couldn't stand her. He tried unsuccessfully to divorce her. Meanwhile she was bedding every man who crossed her path and Prinney couldn't do anything about it.

Georgiana also knew Mary Robinson, who did not deserve the raw deal she got in her life.

There's so much to do and see in London. Don't try to see it all in one go. Just plan to go back again. . . .and again . . . and again.

9/17: When I was taken on a tour of Spencer House, I was struck by how beautiful it was I said, "What a shame Princess Diana didn't live to see it finished". (Diana was descended from Georgiana's brother, the 2nd Earl Spencer, who became 1st lord of the Admiralty). My guide said, "Oh, but she saw it at every stage of its restoration and was very pleased." Ellen

9/17: Re High Tea article at www.fodors.com/news/photos/worlds-10-best-spots-for-afternoon-tea Before I looked at the pictures, I was going to suggest the Orangery at Kensington Palace. I see it's recommended. I was there in the morning, prior to touring Kensington Palace. It was practically empty. I asked if they would serve me tea then. They said, "Any time you like". It's a beautiful space. I've been back there for tea in the afternoon and it was mobbed - long lines to be seated. So I decide that doing tea in London is best in the morning. I don't know if that's a good rule or not. I once had time to kill waiting for a London Walks tour group to come round. Green Park, adjacent to the Ritz Hotel. So, I took myself to the Ritz, told the concierge that I'd just like to look around. Someone took me on a tour, and one of the places we toured was the room where high tea is served. I made a note to come back for tea, and when I did, security was impossible. They wouldn't let me into the hotel unless I could prove I was a guest. If I remember, they said you had to make a reservation well in advance then.

I don't know Cafe Liberty, and I've not had tea at Claridge's. I knew someone who thought tea at Claridge's was the ne plus ultra, but I can't comment from experience.

Don't forget London Walks. I can do 3 of them a day, and in the process, really see London. Morning, afternoon and evening.

One of my sons was in London and thought the Portrait Gallery was quite wonderful. I've not been there, either, but have it on the list for next time. And you might want to check to see if Georgiana's parent's house is open for a tour. It's now owned by the Rothschilds, who, among other things, own the Bank of England. They've restored 4 rooms that are gorgeous and worth seeing. I think it's called Spencer House, and it's 2 or 3 blocks down the hill from the Ritz Hotel on a little cul-de-sac bordering Green Park.

London walks also does out of town trips by train or bus on weekends I've been on two - one to Cambridge, and another to Chatsworth, Georgiana's home when she was married to the Duke of Devonshire. It was Georgiana's son, the 6th duke, who really put Chatsworth on the map. He was gay and his life-long companion was William Paxton, a celebrated botanist at the time when ships of exploration were bringing back exotic plants from around the world Chatsworth's glass house (now torn down) was one of the centers for collecting and the 6th duke was one of the major collectors.

Unfortunately, London doesn't have the tradition of concerts in churches as in Paris, but there are 4 major symphony orchestras in London, and several ballets. The Royal Philharmonic plays at Festival Hall, across the river, in one of the ugliest concert venues I know of. Covent Gardens (where Georgiana and friends used to parade) is also a concert venue (I've never been there.).

Much to do in London. You'll have a great time. Ellen

Later:

When in London, I always go to evensong at Westminster Abbey at least once. It's the evening service left over from the traditions of the monasteries and it's like a time machine. The Church is dark, except for the choir. George Frederick Handel was the organist there during his lifetime. You sit in the choir stalls, and sing the hymns along with the organist and whoever else is there and drink in the exquisite beauty of that gothic masterpiece. I never miss it.