

## LONDON

This is part 3 of our 2011 European trip story.

Our host (and now friend) John drove us to the Exeter railway station for our journey into London. We stopped at a charming pub by the river Exe called "Mill by the Exe" for lunch and then got on the train. This is with 4 suitcases, 2 carryon bags, a backpack and a purse! The taxi driver in London took one look and suggested we get a lorry (truck).

Our plans were to go to Windsor Castle, see the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace, and go to the Isle of Wight, a place for falconry, and other activities. All of this was weather permitting, of course. We checked in to our hotel, and were shocked at the small size of the room for the price, considering the spacious lovely room we had in the Cornwall B&B. There were 2 twin beds and very little place to put ourselves or our luggage! Kathy asked me to go to the hotel desk and work some magic. I went down to the desk, showed my Priority Club card and asked about a larger room.

The nice lady said that the larger room was an additional 30 pounds per night, but came with 2 full breakfasts, which were 12.50 pounds each! That really meant the larger room was effectively only 5 pounds more a night, so we jumped at it!

We had planned to go to Windsor Tuesday, but were warned by our hosts in Cornwall that Tuesday was the first day of horse racing at Ascot track, which is near Windsor Castle. That meant the trains coming and going to Windsor would be very crowded. We revised our plans and went to Windsor on Monday rather than Tuesday. That is an advantage to being on your own when traveling.

Windsor Castle, the largest and oldest occupied castle in the world, is one of the official residences of Her Majesty the Queen. The Castle's dramatic site encapsulates 900 years of British history. It covers an area of 26 acres and contains, as well as a royal palace, a magnificent chapel and the homes and workplaces of a large number of people.



On the way to Windsor, Kathy looked in the hotel gift shop window and saw a collection of cute English cottages made by Lilliput Lane. She was struck by one called "Ferry Cottage" that looked like one she had dreamed of as a child. She said she **really** liked it. I snuck into the shop, bought it and had it laid away for our return from Windsor.

Unfortunately, when we arrived at Windsor, there was a tent sent up at the entrance to the castle with metal detectors. I went to see what was going on, and was told the castle was closed for the day to the public for the ceremony of the Order of the Garter and we were not on the guest list! LOL! This is the second time in 2 years we have tried to go to her house to be turned away.

The Most Noble Order of the Garter is the highest order of chivalry, or knighthood, existing in England, founded in 1348. The Order is dedicated to the image and arms of St. George as England's patron saint, and is presently bestowed on recipients from British and other Commonwealth realms by the Queen in an opulent ceremony.

All was not lost, as Kathy found a beautiful new travel purse, since the cloth bag she bought in Heidelberg was on its last legs. When we got back to the hotel, I distracted her and picked up the

cottage from the gift shop and I snuck it into her new bag. When we got to our room, she unpacked the purse and was pleasantly surprised to see the cottage inside!

The real cottage is situated on the ferry landing stage at Kingswear in Devon, and this cottage captures the calm and tranquility and epitomizes this small village.



The following day we went to Buckingham Palace to see the Changing of the Guard. The guard change is scheduled to take place daily with an official start time of 11.30 am; however the guards do start arriving at 11.15am with music, so we arrived by 10.00am to get the best standing room of the whole ceremony. The official timing of the ceremony is 30 minutes finishing at 12 noon.

Even though we got there early, the crowds were enormous, and kept coming! There were a host of “yellow umbrellas” with their people running behind them almost up to the time of the start of the ceremony!

Most of the ceremony takes place inside the palace grounds, and the gates are surrounded by a mass of humanity so it impossible to see what is going on inside unless you are taller than the other onlookers.



The band marched in, followed by cavalry, and the changing ceremony started. The handover was accompanied by a Guards band. The music played ranged from traditional military marches to songs from films and musicals and even familiar pop songs.

After the changing ceremony, the guard that is relieved marched out, and the crowd dispersed. At that point the “yellow umbrellas” herded their charges back to the waiting tour buses while we sat under a tree in the adjacent park watching the “cattle drive”.



By the time this was over, it was lunchtime. Our hosts from Cornwall recommended we go to the food court at Harvey Nichols rather than the one at Harrods. The taxi driver knew to drop us off at the side entrance elevator to the top floor of the store.

We wandered around looking at the gourmet cheeses, vegetables, and canned goods. There were a number of restaurants, including a café, and a sushi bar with the colored plates on a conveyer belt. The color of the plate indicated the price of the sushi on the plate.

We had a nice lunch, and Kathy picked up some Spanish smoked paprika to bring home with us. The prices there were rather high, and I can imagine what they were at Harrods!

The next day was to be the day that Kathy was to go falconing. When I was checking out the Isle of Wight steam train on the Internet, I came across a note that the Haven Falconry was at the steam train station. Kathy told me that was on her bucket list, so I got on the Internet to get all the schedules.

Haven Falconry was founded by Paul Martin and his wife Sally and is based near Ryde on the Isle of Wight. Paul has a lifelong passion for all things wildlife, in particular birds of prey. The ethos behind Haven Falconry is to promote and preserve the art of falconry and birds of prey for future generations. Education through entertainment and hands-on experience is the goal of the Haven Falconry.

To get there we took what I call a “multi-modal” trip. Taxi to the train station, train to Portsmouth, bus to the hovercraft, hovercraft to the Isle of Wight, electric train to Smallbrook Junction, and finally a steam train to Havenstreet! We started out at 8:30 AM and arrived at 12:30 PM. (whew)

Kathy loved the hovercraft ride, and I enjoyed the steam trains, so it worked for both of us.





We were concerned that because of the rain, our plans for falconing would be cancelled. There was a large tent set up behind the station where we could get out of the rain. I had gone looking for the people, but they had pulled into the tent and Kathy signaled me that they had arrived. The first bird was a barn owl, and Paul gave us the history and the background of how they hunt. Then we both put on a glove and Paul put the owl on Kathy's arm. I also got a chance to have the owl on my arm.



The next bird was a Harris Hawk, and we actually got to fly the bird and have it land on our arms.





The last bird we worked with was the capper. Its name was Merlin, and it was a huge Eagle Owl.



Both Kathy and I were thrilled to work with the birds, but unfortunately we had to catch the last steam train out to get back to London. We reversed the process, steam train to electric train, to hovercraft, to bus. At that point we called a halt to the proceedings, and stopped at a Subway shop for coffee and cookies. We had been on the go since morning, and since we had no commitment to anything we just rested.

We finally caught a train back to London, and people watched in the train station for a while. Many had been to Ascot for the races, and the hats the women were wearing were wild and outrageous! Kathy really enjoyed watching them and the men in their top hats and tails. That night I took pictures of some of them from the TV to give an idea of what they looked like.



I suggested we eat at the railway station, as there were a number of eating places. We finally found one we liked, but when we tried to put in our order, they told us the kitchen was closed! I said, OK, we will order drinks, but will bring in the food from one of the take away stands. They agreed, so that was what we did.

The next day was kind of rainy again, so I suggested we make it a museum day. There were 2 large museums near us, the Natural History Museum, and the Victoria & Albert Museum. We felt the V & A as it is called locally had more to offer. I also had a little guidebook that showed where the most important exhibits were.

In the entrance was a huge glass chandelier made by American glass artist Dale Chihuly. It weighs 3,800 pounds and it is comprised of 1,300 separate blown glass pieces. Also in the entry was a huge pendulum clock.



The first rooms we entered had sculptures and altar pieces from all over Europe. The detail on the altarpieces was fantastic, considering that they were made hundreds of years ago. The details on the one on the right are fantastic, and to think it was done only with hand tools!



One of the most interesting pieces was a tall washstand. Water was poured in the top, and came out into the basin for washing through a spout shaped like an animal. The basin was on a pivot, and could rotate to dump the dirty water into a bucket below the basin.



Our last day in London was quite interesting. We had these unused bus passes, and decided to ride them all over London. We ended up in the shopping district of Oxford Street, and it looked like New York City with all the people. Many of them were so busy texting they ran into one another!

We got back to our hotel around 4 PM, and we had previously purchased some cake at the market across from the hotel. I suggested that since it was "tea time" all over England, I would brew us some tea to have with our cake. We felt very British doing that.

The last night in London was a highlight. We got theatre tickets to see "Love Never Dies", the sequel to "Phantom of the Opera", and enjoyed it thoroughly.

The next morning we headed to the airport, and unfortunately, our plane was out at Terminal 5C, which meant we had to take a train out to it. We then had to take an elevator up to the boarding area, and another one down to the jet way.

The flight home was very comfortable, and we arrived about 15 minutes early. However, there was no gate open for us, and we spent the next 45 minutes on the tarmac. We finally got off the plane, cleared customs and immigration and were met by the driver from our car service.

Believe it or not, within 24 hours of getting home, all the suitcases were unpacked and stored, and all the laundry was done! Kathy and I discussed this, and the only thing we can figure was that flying home in Business Class was so unstressful and comfortable we did not need a week to recover! In summary, these were three never to be forgotten trips in one. We saw a lot, did, a lot and now are home to unwind until our trip to Alaska next month.

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