

# Six Days in London

## May 7 - 12, 2015

Its always a great feeling to be on a plane on the way to London. Its been about 12 years since I last visited and I felt it time to return. I signed up with Road Scholar for their "London Theater -The West End and Beyond" program which includes lectures, back-stage visits and several performances. This would be followed by a tour of Sardinia and Corsica with Saga Holidays. But I also wanted time to get over jetlag before starting out on this adventure

The Delta flight was wonderful and soon I landed at Heathrow's Terminal 4. Since Delta doesn't have an arrivals lounge in this terminal, they make arrangements for us to have a few hours at the in-terminal Yotel. I had never used one, and it was a good experience. Its a miniature hotel room with everything you need to rest or freshen up - shower, bed, TV, and snacks. It turned out to be a secure place to leave luggage and run some airport errands: finding an ATM, getting an Oyster Card for public transportation (thanks Cathy B. for answering all my questions on this new system!) and buying a sim card. Soon I was picked up by the transfer service and I was on my way to my hotel across the street from Kensington Gardens.



Hotel 63 is wonderful. It is a listed (the facade cannot be changed) building built in the 1870's. It is the world headquarters of the Soroptimist Club (a charity group) and they operate the hotel for their members. But if rooms are available they rent to others. My room on the third floor has a view of Kensington Gardens and is cozy (small!) but comfortable. If I ever visit again I'll request a twin room. Staff were very nice and helpful, the breakfast is good and it is about a one minute walk to the Lancaster Gate Tube station.

So in my five days here I did walking tours, became reacquainted with the city, had fun in the Sunday Markets at Spitalfields, Brick Lane and Petticoat Lane and finally visited some travel companies to get brochures as British companies have such good itineraries.

London has changed! The crowds on the tube system are almost overwhelming. And all the new architecture is stunning. I love how locals like giving names to some of the buildings that have gone up since my last visit:

- The Shard -- for London Bridge Tower Building ( and the tallest building in the EU)
- The Cheese Grater -- for the Leadenhall Building
- The Gherkin -- for the 30 St. Mary Axe building

- The Cell Phone Building - for the 20 Fenchurch Street Building (looks like a Nokia 1100)
- The Armadillo - for the Greater London Authority Building
- The Razor - for the Srata Building

It makes for a beautiful as well as interesting skyline.

I also had time to make my way to the Wallace (Art) Collection - housed in a family mansion that has been gifted to the country. It is known for its French porcelain and paintings. I didn't have time to enjoy coffee in the courtyard, which is one of the nicest places for a snack. And I love their bathrooms -- all individual rooms - very post!



Venice: the Grand Canal with  
San Simone Piccolo

My goal is to visit my favorite painting by Canaletto which you may remember from my Florence trip summary. If not, here it is again:

## A Visit to The King

On the day before the Road Scholar Theater Program began, I take the train to Leicester to meet my friend Joan and..... THE KING! And I don't mean Elvis! Leicester is where the bones of King Richard III were found under a parking





lot, very fittingly under a space marked “R” (serendipidislly for Rex??), but really for “Reserved”. Joan took the train down from Durham and I came up from London. Our trains arriving about 20 min. apart. We met in 1996 on an Explore Worldwide trip in Uzbekistan. Then in 2001 we traveled together to Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. A few years later we made a pilgrimage to Hay-on-Wye - the “Town of Books” in Wales and a few years after that, we caught up with each other in London.

After a stop for coffee and a good catch-up we made our way thru Leicester’s medieval lanes to the Cathedral where Richard III is buried. The Cathedral is beautiful and there has been a church on this site since 1086, though much of the current building dates from Victorian times.



The tomb of King Richard III

The story of the finding of the bones is amazing - with a sequence of events that happened just right. The Visitors Center across the church has interactive displays telling the whole story. King Richard III was killed at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485 and buried by the Grey Friars in their church. Over the years the church was lost and eventually the site became a parking lot. Philippa Langley, a member of the Richard III



Society felt it was important to locate the site of the Greyfriars church and personally raised the money for an archaeological excavation. Just a few days into the dig, bones with a curved spine and battle wounds were found and a few months later, thanks to carbon dating and DNA work, the bones were identified as those of King Richard III. What impressed me about Ms. Langley is that in the film at the Visitors Center, she said she always got a “feeling” when walking thru the parking lot, and this is what inspired her to begin her work.



Joan and I have a wonderful day together and very reluctantly say goodbye.

The next day it's time to move to the Radisson Blu Grafton Hotel and meet the Road Scholar group.

