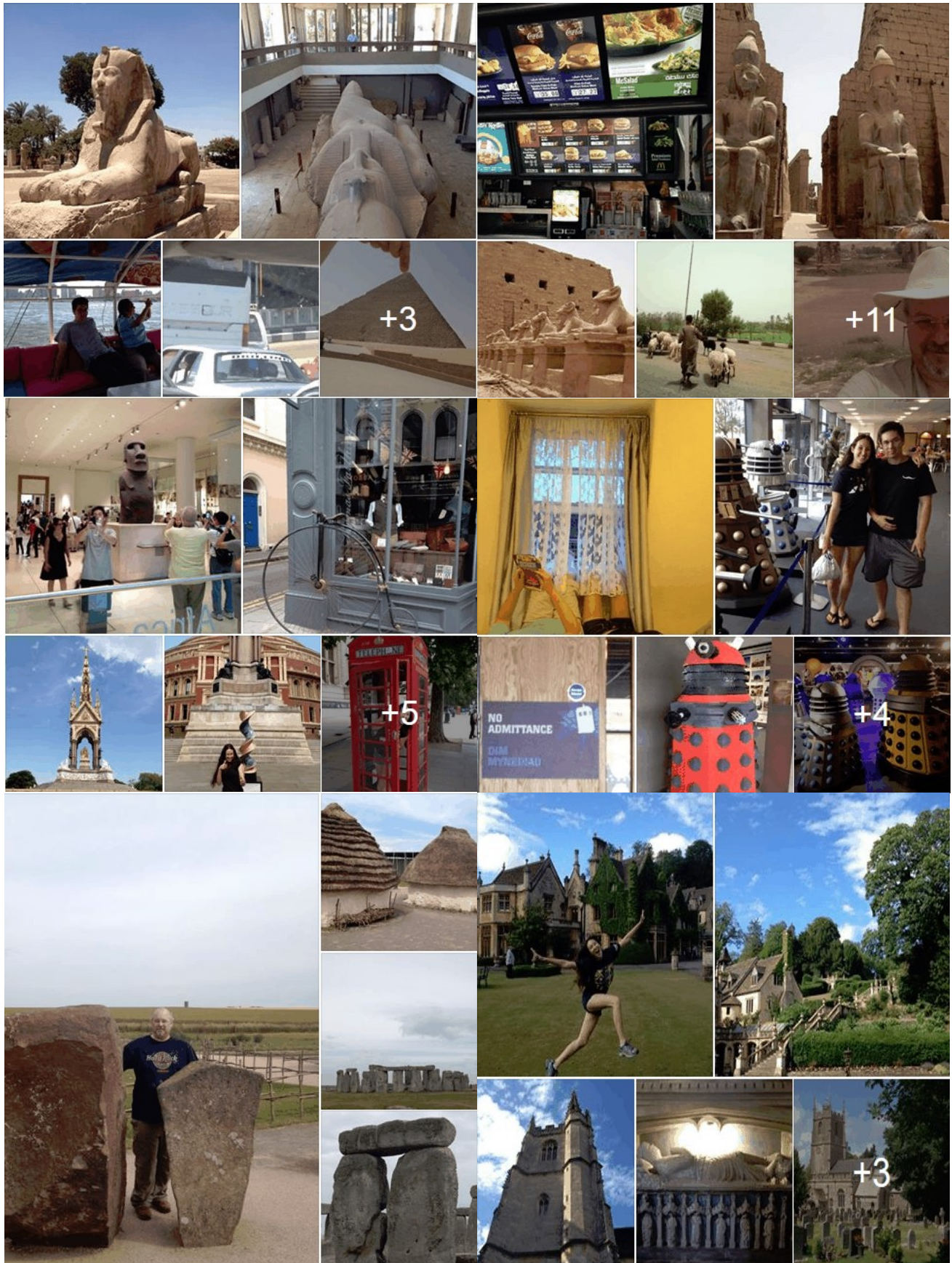


Egypt & England 2015 - The Family Trip



6/26 – It was way too early when we left our hotel in Istanbul. The hotel gave us box breakfasts. Our cab driver drove very fast at this time of the morning, as there was no traffic. We ate half of our box breakfasts before going through security. It was a lame breakfast. Everyone saved the sandwich for later. Our gate was a considerable distance away – the last gate in the airport in fact. I was actually impressed by the size of this terminal. The sign at the main shopping area stated that it would take us 20 minutes to get there and they were right (so... just about a mile?). We had plenty of time though once we got there. They weren't even letting people through the last security check to the gate seating area yet. And so we sat just outside. They did not announce the boarding, but I just happened to see folks getting on a bus to the plane and it turned out to be ours. Had I not been vigilant, we might have missed the plane! From where we were sitting, we couldn't see anyone going through the last metal detector, though obviously they did. We did too, and before you knew it, we were zipping along the tarmac heading towards our plane (a considerable distance away!)



The flight was nice – we got a nice breakfast and I got to see ancient Galatia and Anatolia from my window seat while flying over Turkey. After Turkey, we saw the Mediterranean for a little while, and then the coast of Egypt. The delta was very green and it looked very dense with farming. The farms became fewer and fewer, and there were more houses, and brown spots, and then it became a sea of beige as we approached Cairo. I got to see the **Pyramids**! They looked so little from up here, but I knew they weren't. We made a big turn to get to the airport on the far side of Cairo. Cairo is huge! So much density and everything beige. Not a spot of color anywhere... except beige. Right before the airport was this massive **terraced mountainside**. I had no explanation for it; it looked out of place. Even the airport appeared to be beige as we landed. There was sand everywhere – even on the runway. When we got to the gate, I had to go to the bathroom and Barb wanted to switch to pants. We were in no hurry, but the result was that we were the last ones out of the restricted area. Our agent, Mohammed, was wondering where we were and he was getting a little concerned when we arrived. The

next thing that happened was that Turkish Airlines lost Courtney's bag so we spent an hour taking care of that. If they found it, I would have to come back to the airport myself between 10-4 to collect it. These were prime sightseeing hours and the airport is way out of town! I was getting upset. Just as we were leaving 1.5 hours later, the bag showed up as a single item on the carousel. I began to wonder if this had been some sort of ploy to get money out of us – the timing was just too coincidental, but "Yea God" all the same.

Because we are Americans, we have been assigned a police officer; this is at the request of the American Consulate. We had no choice about it. We were also given a choice of four "American" hotels to choose from for our stay, which bumped the price way up for this trip. Our hotel was hard to get into. Surrounding the ground floor was a massive wall. At the gate, there were armed guards and bomb sniffing dogs. Our van was searched. We then drove up a very protected ramp to a small parking area with more armed guards. This was the hotel entrance. Once we got into the lobby, I had the feeling that we wouldn't be allowed to go out on our own (later confirmed by the hotel staff – we were prisoners here).



Our hotel was VERY nice with views of the Nile River and the city of Cairo from our 31st floor. We quickly went downstairs, met our guide, Wahid, and off we went. Because today was a cool day, only 95 degrees before noon with a light breeze, we went to the hotter sites: Memphis and Saqqara. Along the way, Wahid told us all about the area.



Some illegal structures near the Nile

Upper floors of apartment structures are left unfinished for future generations to build upon (I wonder if they account for this in the foundations?). Rebar and pillars are what you see on the tops of most buildings. These buildings are also illegal structures, built over fertile land, and quite probably, ancient archaeology. All this has come about recently because the current government is weak, so they can't uphold any laws, and unemployment is really high, especially outside of Cairo, so everyone comes to Cairo hoping to find work. Only five years ago, you could see the Pyramids from the Nile River or anything west of the river. Now

you can't – these illegal

structures are built practically up to the Pyramids on the only land that will support food in this area. It's really short-sided, but it's the only land that was preserved by the previous government. These typically three to four story buildings have no windows or doors when first built (residents have to add them), no kitchens, no gas, and no water. They are basically concrete pillars that have been filled-in with super lightweight bricks. All cooking, cleaning, pooping, etc., happens at or near the Nile. The result is that the Nile is now getting very polluted and it's affecting the fertile delta downstream where almost 100% of Egypt's food is grown. It's truly criminal what is happening here.

Memphis had a really impressive Sphinx and several large and awesome statues of Ramses II. These were statues commissioned during his life. We know this because one foot is in front of the other, showing that he was still moving, and hence alive. Also, his beard is straight, not curled at the end. Our guide, Wahid, is an adjunct professor at Cairo University in the Egyptology Department who supplements his income with these tours (he makes double his salary doing this). He was requested specifically by the tour company for me because of my Art History education. He told me that he only did this in the middle of Ramadan (usually a "vacation" time) because I was a Nawas VIP and should be treated as such. He was the one tour guide who could answer my very specific questions (I've worked with Nawas for many years now and they know that I'm not your average tourist – I'm probably much more annoying to them than average.).



Saqqara was awesome. First stop was to a Mastaba. The art on the inside is so finely detailed and there's a whole lot of pigment that still exists (ochre tempera). It's all original too, so about 4500 years old. The guard tried several times to take our picture or have us take a picture of the inside, which is illegal. We had been warned that this might happen by Wahid. The guard would then extort us for money or confiscate our camera because we had been caught doing something illegal. I spent a lot of time in that very hot, cramped space asking him to please go away. He would not. Nor did he seem to care that I actually knew what I was seeing and didn't need his assistance in any way. In the end, I almost had no choice but to allow him to show me around and of course, that cost me a bit of money. Let's just say that his expertise was not the art, certainly, but fleecing tourists. The tomb we were in, by the way, was the Pyramid of Pharaoh Te Teh.



Pyramid of Te Teh

Pyramid of Djoser or Zozer



The next pyramid was the one I had come to see: the stepped pyramid of Djoser (or Zozer). This was the first pyramid complex ever built. I did not realize that this pyramid was hollow in the center, like a corbelled arch. There was also a hypostyle entrance where "guards" seemed to be lying in wait. If it was possible, these guys were even pushier than at the last pyramid. Because it was Ramadan, and Wahid could neither eat nor drink, he left us to seek shade while we looked about. So, while I was photographing the stepped pyramid, my daughter went to go pet a donkey that was there. Big mistake! Before she knew it, the owner of the donkey had her camera and her on top of the horse. Barbara came over to rescue her and also wound up getting dressed up as a local to get photographed by a friend of the first guy, who also had a donkey. I was easily fifty yards away when I first saw this happening. I went over to stop all this nonsense, but they also tried to dress me up. When that didn't work, they mentioned something about the best picture being out in the desert so they led my daughter and wife away on various barnyard animals as I tried to stop them. Photos were taken and then they asked me for \$20 US. I only had Egyptian Pounds on me, which they didn't want (their currency is not stable). My guide book



Placeholder: need girls on donkeys

mentioned that pictures are worth about 6 Egyptian Pounds (or a few pennies U.S.), so I tried to seriously talk them down. The thing was, they had my wife, my daughter and her camera and we were now in the deep desert practically out of sight of the pyramid. I was not going to get that camera back unless they got a fair amount of money. We settled on about \$15 U.S. in Egyptian Pounds. They then tried to get more money from me to “feed the donkies.” I refused and stormed off, now that I had the camera back and the womenfolk. When I got back to civilization and to Wahid, he said that I should have paid no more than \$5 U.S. tops after haggling and that I had been swindled. Well duh, I knew that as it was happening but didn’t feel that I could do all that much. Wahid said that he’d stick closer to us tomorrow when we go to the Giza complex where the vendors are even pushier. Great! The result of this adventure though was, though I got a few nice pictures, I really didn’t have time to get close to the pyramid or study it in any way. Most of my time had been spent rescuing my girls. I assumed that Jeffrey at least had had a good time, but no, he missed our whole adventure. He had gone to seek shade with Wahid.



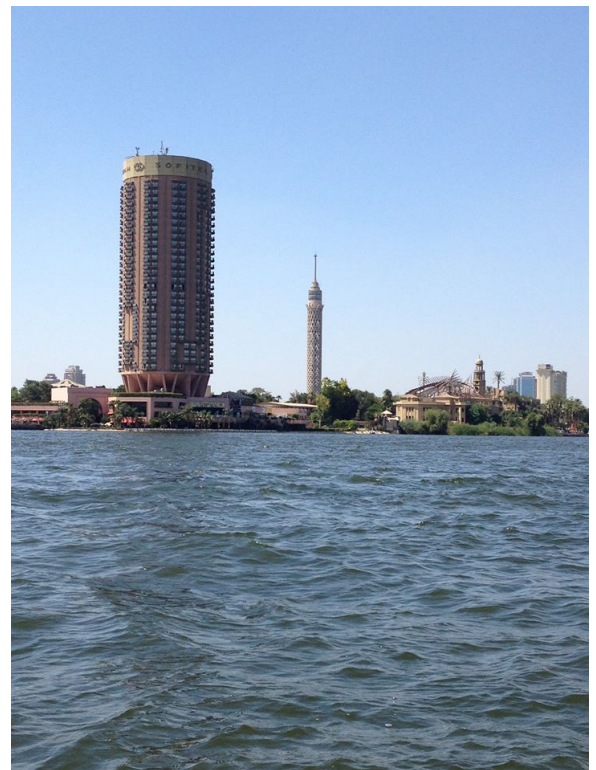
Wahid, Courtney and I on a Felucca

normal. No one ever parts peacefully or pleasantly in this country so long as money is involved. This whole country runs on tips – it’s a huge deal here.

On the way back to the hotel, we got stopped by the police. We had deviated from our tour schedule and when they couldn’t find us, they had scoured the city, assuming we had been kidnapped. Our personal security guy straightened the whole thing out, but we were told not to deviate from the plan again.

We spent the rest for the evening in our hotel room. We were not allowed to leave. Jeffrey was resting today because he might have what Courtney already has because he felt terrible. Courtney has been run-down for a few days now. Also, because we’re a week into Ramadan, our guide did not take us anywhere for lunch. Most lunch places are closed. No lunch or dinner was being served in our hotel in honor of Ramadan either. We ate our crummy breakfast sandwiches from our previous hotel along with some power bars we had had the foresight to bring prior to the trip. None of us had dinner. I’m so hungry right now and my pain meds for my foot are eating through my stomach because they have to be taken with food. Breakfast cannot come soon enough!

Our tour was supposed to be mostly over today, now that it was noon, but Nawas had chartered a free Felucca (boat) ride on the Nile for us for being brave enough to come to Egypt. Very nice! It was a beautiful day and the boat ride was excellent. Courtney’s hair got very “big” due to the wind and humidity. After we docked, things remained copasetic until we disembarked. Although Nawas paid the driver, and gave him the customary tip, he also wanted a tip from me. I did not give in, so we went away as he shouted insults at us, which, from what I understand, is what he would have done even if I had given him a tip because no tip is ever big enough in Cairo. Our guide told us that this was



6/27 – I was up at five so no issue with our 8:30 meeting time in the lobby. The breakfast was fairly Egyptian, which meant that we didn't recognize anything. It was good though, and the highlights were fava beans with peppers that tasted like Mexican Chili and the fresh Strawberry Juice.

We met Wahid at 8:15 along with a new security guard. This one smiled more.

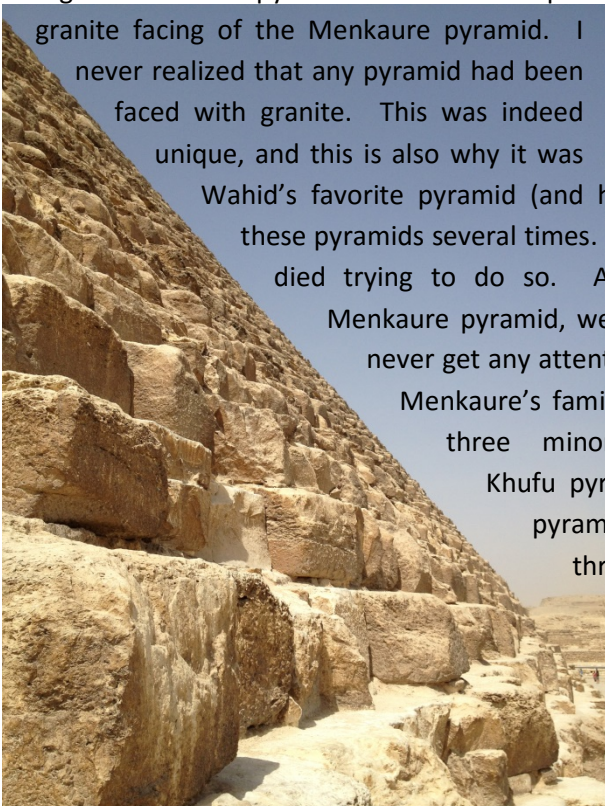
Our first stop was to the pyramids of Giza. "Pyramid," by the way, means "Cake" in Greek because when Herodotus (5th c. B.C.) wrote about Egypt, he thought the pyramids looked like a cake. Anyway, we got to the pyramid of Khufu and Courtney began to feel really bad. She went to the bathroom twice between the ticket booth and the pyramid of Khufu.

Good news! They do let tourists climb on the pyramids... in a well-controlled area and only about 30 feet up (with safety stairs built into the structure). We climbed about, took our pictures, then went between Khafre & Menkaure pyramids where there weren't many tourists so we could talk about the limestone facing of the Khafre pyramid versus the unique

granite facing of the Menkaure pyramid. I never realized that any pyramid had been faced with granite. This was indeed unique, and this is also why it was

Wahid's favorite pyramid (and his specialty within his studies). As a kid, Wahid had climbed all these pyramids several times. Now, no one may climb the pyramids because too many tourists had died trying to do so. Anyway, while we were at the Menkaure pyramid, we saw three minor pyramids that never get any attention. These were the pyramids of Menkaure's family (wives, kids?). There are also three minor pyramids along with the Khufu pyramid so there are actually nine pyramids in the Giza complex, not three.

Originally, there had been 27, but a Muslim emperor dismantled 18 of them to make a palace for himself.





Our Next stop was a panoramic view and a camel ride. So, this is where all the tourists are! It was hard to get a picture because of all the people... and sand that was beginning to rise up. It was really windy here. Tourist's hats were flying all over (Thank God for my lanyard). I forgot to mention this earlier, but the forecast for today is a massive sandstorm this afternoon. You won't see that in a U.S. weather report! Jeff took his camel ride and Barb and I took pictures. Courtney stayed in the van.

On the way down to the Sphinx, Wahid told us that the Sphinx's name was again from Herodotus, which he had borrowed from the story of *Oedipus Rex*. He also told us that in 2020, three things would happen: there will be a new, proper museum in Cairo; the two boats in the "temporary" boat museum between the pyramids will go to that museum, and; there will be a tram or people mover of some sort running along Khufu's pyramid because so many of the tourists who come here are old and only want to take pictures of the pyramids, but they don't want to walk around in the hot sand.



When we got to the Sphinx, we first saw the temple of preparation for Khafre's mummy and then we got to see the Sphinx. We learned that the two canals by Memphis went right to the doorstep of the preparation room originally. All the rock from the quarry (except for the granite for the Menkaure pyramid, which came from Aswan 650 miles away, was floated here, but only during flood season, so the building of the pyramid was seasonal and only employed around 3000 workers, farmers mostly, and each pyramid was completed in around 20 years. They were not built by slaves or Israelites or Israelite slaves.





The Sphinx was alright to look at, until that wall of sand started coming towards us rapidly. I was getting my picture taken in front of the Sphinx when I saw the sand storm approaching. I kid you not; it was just like you see in the movies. I told Jeff to turn around and he said something akin to “whoa.” The two of us got out of there as fast as we could. Wahid, Barbara and Courtney had stayed in the van. The wall of sand hit us just as we dove into the van (again, sort of like in the movies). We couldn’t see much after that. We were taken to a nearby sandstone sculpture place to peruse the goods and get a nice glass of rose tea while we waited out the worst of the storm. Soon after, we went to the Egyptian Museum of Antiquities. You could have called it an Egyptian Warehouse because it did not look like a traditional museum. It was mostly large rooms with large Egyptian stuff. We spent two hours in that

museum. It’s massive, but I also know that we could have been in and out of there in half an hour if we had simply walked through the place. Wahid explained just about everything in there, because this was his area of expertise (and the reason he was with us). Eventually, we all got weary. Courtney sat down a lot. My enthusiasm waned after the first hour. Barbara and Jeffrey really never did pay attention. They wandered more than they listened. I envied them. I must admit that I was duly impressed by the Tut Collection (and I didn’t think I would be). I also liked the very realistic looking eyes of some of the later period sculptures. I saw so many things that were in my school textbooks (almost all in the last rooms we looked at, after Wahid had left for about 20 minutes to go do something). Some were a lot bigger than I thought, and some a lot smaller. Two important pieces had recently been stolen – we may never see them again. With no security in this place, stealing only takes the will to do it, and maybe a wheelbarrow if the piece is heavy. Even though we weren’t stealing anything, we could go right up and touch just about anything we wanted to.

When we got out of the museum, Tahrir Square (where millions had protested their government in 2011) was looking darkish and the sky was a really weird rose-beige color. The sandstorm had swept-over Cairo. Visibility at this point was maybe a mile. In no time, we all had this super-fine sand all over us and in every orifice – in our ears, nose and mouth. I tasted grit. We sought shelter in the van. Man, now I know why this entire city looks sand-colored from the air, and why most carpets are Berber (to hide the sand, which is everywhere. Actually, that was one of my questions coming into Egypt: how do you keep the sand off the roads? The answer is: you don’t. There is sand everywhere and on the roads... along with trash, tires, major appliances, food stands, random chickens, children, bicycles, donkeys, old people... and cars, lots of cars, and no lanes, and no rules, and no police.).



Egyptian Museum of Antiquities



We drove to a famous Egyptian food place where Jimmy Carter had once dined (one of the few places opened during Ramadan – it must be run by Coptic Christians). As we travelled, sand was beginning to build up in the streets. The restaurant had tons of atmosphere, and it smelled wonderful due to all the shish-kabobs cooking over a wood fire pit at the entry to this place. Wahid said a quick goodbye to us and left with the van and the driver. It was Ramadan and they didn't want to stick around. Suddenly, we were all alone, except for that security guard outside, who must have been smelling meat for the next hour while we dined. Poor guy.

Being alone was a bit scary at first, but we got over it. We were just about the only people in the place, and those who were there stared at us a lot. We tried the lamb kebobs, lentil soup, tahini, baba ganoush, lamb balls, a ginger drink and cardamom rice. It was all fantastic.



The driver came back with the van, but without Wahid. When we got to our hotel room, Jeffrey joked that he needed to call the front desk because they had promised us a Nile view with this hotel room. The Nile was less than 100 yards from the hotel, yet we could not see it! We couldn't see much of anything.

Our agent Mohammed called us to let us know that our 7 AM flight to Luxor would now be 5AM and that we would have to wake up at 2:15. Yikes!

The girls went to the spa down in the basement for a while. All of us took showers to get the grit out of everywhere.

6/28 – Well, that was early. We were to leave the hotel before 3 AM but as we were getting ready, it became more and more apparent that Courtney was not. She was feeling really lousy today. With 10 minutes to go, we had to come up with a new plan. Barb would stay with Courtney in Cairo while Jeff and I would go to Luxor as planned. She went downstairs to work with Mohammed while Jeff and I repacked lighter. Fortunately, the hotel had the same room available for us (this hotel is barely occupied. It's just us and a few British families). Mohammed also worked on getting some medicine for Courtney.

We left a bit late but we still made it to the airport with plenty of time to spare. The flight was quick and before you knew it, we were there. We met our agent and driver at the gate (security is NOT tight in Luxor) and we took off to go to our hotel.

Now this is what I imagined Egypt would be like: the Nile; the date palms; mudbrick buildings everywhere; laid-back people on scooters and tuk-tuks. The place was amazing. So was our hotel. It was likely built in the 1920s or 1930s and it had a real Art Deco feel about it. It was like being in some 1920s movie. We dropped off our bags and headed downstairs to meet our guide. His name was Anul. He was also an Egyptologist and he has spent much of his time digging around the Valley of the Kings. He said he just knows that there are still three undiscovered tombs and he wants to find them! He has also worked for the Discovery Channel on some Egypt specials.



Our hotel lobby in Luxor

It was a good thing that we were out on the west Nile early because it was going to be a hot day. I thought flying in that the sandstorm must have hit here as well – there was a major haze everywhere and it was that same eerie color as yesterday. Anul assured us that this was not the case because you can taste and feel a sandstorm – sandstorms are annoying; smog is smog. This was merely smog from Cairo, which takes about two days to get here. The rest is humidity (which isn't much). This smog did block the sun somewhat and it gave the Valley of the Kings some "mystery."

Our guide explained the sites ahead of time because he's not allowed to lecture inside (to minimize the number of people and time inside the tombs, which degrades the art over time). After his fairly long lecture, he sent us to three tombs that were not on Travelocity's "best of" list, but hey, he's the Egyptologist so we went with it. The tombs were wonderful, but those tomb guards trying to part me from my money were so annoying! They minimized our time inside because we were running from them rather than enjoying the art in the tomb. Tomb #2 was a challenge for me because it was really deep. The passageways were made for very short, thin people and the walkways weren't stairs, but wooden ramps with slats about every foot so you wouldn't slip too much. Also, it actually got hotter as you descended, which I would not have expected. Getting out was the biggest challenge. My shoes have little traction and it's dusty inside so most of my effort was in using the handrails while placing my toes on the slats.



Funerary Temple of Queen Hatshepsut

At the end of our visit to the Valley of the Kings, it was still hazy out and around 90 degrees. Stop two was the Funerary Temple of Queen Hatshepsut. About 95% of this temple/tomb is reconstructed, but the 5% that is real is amazing. This whole complex was breathtaking and so iconic (at least to this Art Historian). Our next stop, the Valley of the Queens, had no tourists, only those damn tomb guards. Only two tombs were open today, so our choices were pretty well set. These tombs were nice, but not as nice as the Valley of the Kings sites. These tomb guards were also less annoying.



After a short stop at the **Memnon twins** near the Ramses III complex (where Joseph was in biblical times!), we rode to the East side of the Nile. This was a delightful drive through fertile fields and adobe brick homes. At one point, we got stopped on the road by a **herd of sheep**.



A fraction of Karnack's Hypostyle Hall

The Karnack Temple was massive. I was getting a little ticked off because our guide, Anul, walks very fast and never gives us time to take pictures. I think he was trying to beat the heat, now that it was 100 degrees out. Hey, at least this guide was a Coptic Christian so he could eat and drink with us during Ramadan. The result of his fast walking was that we were taking pictures on the run. The other result is that he is in most of the pictures... at least the back of him. At this temple, he started to eat from the trees: first dates, then figs, then sycamore. We tried them too. All were highly questionable as a preferred food source. He tried to get us to see a Sekhmet statue, since he knew of my particular interest in this Egyptian Goddess (I had done research on Sekhmet in college), but her temple in this complex was closed and no one was around to get it open for us. It was very remote

from the rest of the complex, so I wasn't surprised. We took a different route back to the main part of the temple, so we actually saw a lot that's not on the standard tour. Our last place to visit before leaving was the ceremonial pool for all the temple priests. This place was as big as an Olympic pool. Our guide said that at night, people sit in front of the pool while a presentation and light show is projected on Karnack's main walls. We could come back tonight to see this ~~tourist trap~~ awesome presentation, but we opted not to.

We had a brief stop at an alabaster manufacturing place. The shopkeeper gave us coffee. I bought a baby Sekhmet made of soapstone.



Sekhmet's Temple in Karnack



All pictures Temple at Luxor

It was 110 degrees by the time we reached our last stop, Luxor Temple. After Karnack, this seemed so small, and yet it was still several city blocks. The entry way was lined with Sphynx statues on either side. Recent digs a mile away showed that this entry with Sphynx's had originally been at least a mile long. One of the early things we saw was a mosque on top of some of the hypostyle columns, some 40 feet in the air. This seemed a little out of place, but our guide explained that Luxor had been completely buried by sand and in late Medieval times, this mosque had been built on a pretty sturdy piece of rock... which happened to be the lintel (roof) of Luxor's hypostyle hall. When the sand was dug out, the Egyptian government (or the French or the English – whoever dug this out) decided to keep the Mosque there. We were now seeing the back of the mosque. The front of the mosque is at street level on a road outside this tourist area. Inside the temple, there was a lot of original Egyptian paint and there was a medieval Christian fresco, which seemed out of place, but Luxor had been used as a church in early medieval times. There was also hand-etched graffiti in this place, some of which dates back to Greek times (500 BC). The graffiti was in

Latin, French and English. I guess a lot of people have spent time here with nothing better to do. Many different militaries have used this temple as a military barracks.

Our guide could see that we were wilting, so he offered to take us to McDonalds (we had commented on the rather large McDonalds poster at the entrance to the temple). Aside from the usual fare (burgers, shakes) we had apple Fantas, which were very good.

Our guide and driver left us at our hotel and we rested. Jeffrey had a neck ache so we tried twice to get medicine by walking to various pharmacies within a few blocks of our hotel, but they were all closed due to Ramadan. We also got hassled by street vendors both times we exited our hotel. They are so desperate for money. At least one of them had a sense of humor.

We got Wi-Fi finally (only free and available in the lobby) and I was able to call Barbara. Courtney was doing better. Dinner was some really mediocre pizza and lousy service at the hotel, but at least the restaurant was open.

Our hotel, by the way, also runs river cruises. Of the 280 ships in Luxor, only 20 operate right now. Since Luxor relies 100% on tourist dollars, they are really economically depressed right now.

Jeffrey informs me that we have walked 18600 steps today, or 9.5 miles, and 45 flights of stairs. It feels like it.



An aside: The Mighty Scarab

The mighty scarabs of Egypt were the “keepers of the sun” and they were worshipped because they carried or rolled the sun during the night so it could rise again the next day as they carried it back up. You’ll never see a real scarab in the daytime; they’re only active at night. And they do roll stuff around – the vessel that will carry the eggs of the next generation (it’s the circle of life!). The Egyptians were keen observers of nature, so as they observed these scarabs rolling balls around, they imagined them rolling the sun. Today, we call the mighty scarabs dung beetles.

Aside #2: Bible Characters by my hotel

Three wavy lines in hieroglyphics is pronounced “*mu*”, and as you might guess, it stands for water. According to our tour guide, this is the first word all Egyptian kids learn as babies, not mommy (mama) or daddy (dada). A bird hieroglyphic symbol is pronounced “*sus*.” It is a duck symbol. When you put these two hieroglyphs together, you get Moses: one who comes out of the water. The Egyptians found baby Moses in a basket on the Nile, maybe just outside our hotel (and not by the Pyramids in Giza), so they named him Moses. The word Sarah (Sarai) also comes from Egypt. It is not a Hebrew word. It is what the Egyptians called her when Abraham came here. It means “princess.” Sarah was the original Jewish Princess.

6/29 – It was so nice to sleep in! The only time constraint we had this morning was meeting our bus at 11:15. My shower smelled and tasted familiar – like New York lake water at my parent’s house. This water was coming directly from the Nile – I was baiting in Nile river water! And why not, it’s cheap and abundant.

Jeff and I were the only diners for breakfast at 8:30. Everyone else was already out exploring on this perfectly clear 100 degree day. We were able to see mountains we couldn’t see yesterday due to the smog. After



Where baby Moses was likely picked up (view of the Nile from our hotel in Luxor)

breakfast, a breeze sprang up, but then some smog appeared. We watched a Kevin Costner movie in our room (we found out that the Egyptians love Kevin Costner and Nicholas Cage. They also went crazy for the new version of the Knight Rider, which only lasted one season), then headed downstairs to the lobby where the Wi-Fi is. Before long, our agent and driver showed up and we were off. The traffic is so stress free here... compared to Cairo at least. It was a beautiful drive as well. This valley is so green and fertile. Our guide told us yesterday that once the Aswan Dam became operational, the farmers got three growing seasons rather than one.

This Luxor airport is small – I didn’t realize that coming in. It’s a regional airport, not international. When I asked my agent, “which gate,” upon receipt of our tickets, he said “only one gate.” There were actually three gates, but in one room and all three gates and each gate led to the same sidewalk where busses pick you up and take you to the plane... so why are there three gates?

I have never flown in an Embraer jet. I have only flown in their prop planes. It had a nice 2 x 2 seating arrangement.



Nile view from our new hotel room in Cairo

We found (rather than met) Mohammed outside baggage when we got to Cairo and then we drove through town during a “Ramadan rush hour” at 2PM. There were cars, motorcycles, people and chickens all over the streets, yet the system seemed to work. No one was dying and the traffic kept moving. Our bus driver tells us that in Egypt, you only need four things to drive: good wheels, good brakes, a good horn, and good luck. Truly, there are no rules of the road here and no one to enforce them. Our driver and guide got a kick out of my explanation of U.S. driving habits. We also talked about the U.S. school system, which passed the time as we plodded along. Soon we were at the hotel. We got new connecting rooms, and met the girls upstairs. They were pretty chatty and they wanted to hear all about our trip. After we showed them all the photos, I did laundry. While that dried, we went downstairs for dinner but our selected restaurant was full and we did not meet the dress code anyway, so we went up and ordered the same food we would have gotten downstairs as room service. Good thing too – I was beginning to feel awful – I think I have Courtney’s flu!

6/30 – False alarm – no flu, just traveler’s tummy. Two doses of Imodium did the trick. We had to get up early to meet our agent and driver, but since we’ve been getting up early a lot, I think we’ve adjusted to this new norm. We were downstairs well ahead of the 5:45 meet-up time. Checkout was quick and we opted not to get the box breakfast because the boxes were unwieldy, the food was lousy (and what exactly did they want us to do with the two jars of jam?), and we would be fed much better on the airplane. The ride to the airport was quick and uneventful. Our driver took us to the “shortcut” that the flight crews use to get into the airport, but the angry guards wouldn’t let us in so we had to hike up a long ramp to get upstairs where everyone else entered. I needed to have a print of my itinerary to get to the ticket counter (past the second security check) so I had to go to the Turkish Air counter to get that. What a hassle! The ticket agent was able to also print our second leg for today, which was not technically a transfer because it was a second round trip ticket, and she told us that we would be able to go through the transfer door, thus avoiding immigration and another round of security checks. I was glad because we only had an hour between flights and Ataturk Airport is a big place.

I took a chance on watching a Turkish science fiction on the plane. It was good and very funny. Alas, the flight ended before the movie did.

Shoot! They parked the plane on the tarmac and they're making us take a bus to the terminal. More wasted time. We were slowed down by a gal with a kid and way too much luggage who couldn't drag everything to the bus and no one was helping her. We were on the bus already and quite packed in or I would have helped. None of the men outside were helping. Perhaps this is a cultural or religious thing (?). After what seemed like an eternity, a ground crew person helped her set up her stroller so she could move the fifteen feet from the airplane staircase to the bus.

Well, we got through that transfer door as promised and... security check! Gaaaa! The three of us got through quickly but my wife was not built for rapid transit at the moment because she had not packed everything in a single bag but instead had opted to carry many loose items about her person. NOW she was going to pack... in the middle of perhaps the busiest part of one of the busiest airports. While she did that, I went to go see where the gate was on the big board. I got the gate number, came back and she was almost ready to go. The gate was not far way away, about 6-8 minutes (hey, better than 20) according to the signs (I still think it is terrific that they include this information!). We got there and... wrong gate; I guess I read the wrong number, or had a dyslexic moment. Fortunately, our gate was a 100 feet away. We got on the "late people" bus and were again driven to our plane far, far away. We got situated and the plane took off 10 minutes later. We had made our tight connection.



(Luxor) Women are along the road under ever tree. What are they doing?

I watched the end of that Turkish Sci-Fi, and then watched "The Happening." Both were excellent. The chicken lunch was outstanding. At Heathrow, we processed slowly through immigration and then got on the underground at rush hour. We sat in the very hot train until our transfer point, and then we stood in a second very crowded train until we reached Victoria Station. The station had changed a bit since last time I was here, so I was disoriented. I thought I knew my direction, but without a map, I wasn't so sure. The road construction just outside created a couple of pedestrian detours that also didn't help. My iPhone was no help. Finally, I unpacked my Rick Steves book which had appropriate maps. Yay Rick! It wasn't far to our B&B – maybe a mile. We found our home for the next three days (the Jubilee) and moved in. Our room in the basement had a long hallway leading to a big open room and microscopic bathroom. The room was hot because there is never A/C in England, and England was experiencing a record heatwave.

Maybe an hour later, we went back to Victoria Station to walk around and have dinner; perhaps we would find free internet. The free Wi-Fi was impossible to get (passcode required) but we did get burritos, McDonalds and Costa Coffee (my favorite!). Courtney says she likes this little section of London that we've seen so far. I think she'll be impressed with the rest tomorrow. She keeps trying to do an English accent, but she has not succeeded so far.

7/1 – Ray kept waking me up in the middle of the night with his texting – for some reason, he thought we were arriving at SFO today. He was a week off. I got up at five today and could not seem to go back to sleep. I wanted to sleep in, but it's so hot out! Today, it's supposed to be 94 degrees and tomorrow, it's supposed to rain. Over the next few hours, the other three got up. We had a proper English breakfast at around eight and started walking at nine. **Buckingham Palace** was not that far away from our B&B and I had never been there before. The queen was home (the raised flag tells us this), but we didn't see her. We walked along the wall that surrounds the palace. There was electrified barbed wire on top. This led to a park where Lord Wellington was honored. The Hard Rock Café was just around the corner from **Wellington's monument and arch** so we went there. They were not opened yet so we went to a super fancy hotel bar and had the best cappuccino I have ever had. I got my Hard Rock T-Shirt a half an hour later and then we hit the Tube to the Albert & Victoria Museum across town. Courtney had forgotten her Oyster Card so I had to buy a day pass for her.

Everyone loved the Victoria & Albert Museum (I knew they would!) There is so much to see there! Not far away was The **Royal Albert Hall** so we walked there. Across the street was an Albert memorial so we went there. About a mile inside of Hyde Park is Victoria & Albert's Palace, so we went to see it. A mile to the other side of the park and we were back on the Tube. A few stops later, we got off and walked to the British Museum, or almost to it. It was now lunch time and we were hungry. Just outside the museum entrance was a fish and chips place. This turned out to be a big, greasy mistake. No one liked the English fish and chips because of the grease and because the skin was still on the fish, which is normal here (truthfully, I have NEVER liked fish and chips in London – you gotta go to Scotland.)





The **British Museum** is vast, containing all the booty England stole during its imperial days. We avoided the Asia and Africa sections which lessened our walking time by a third. Still, by the end, Barbara's feet were puffy and mine simply didn't work anymore. Even Jeffrey said he was tired, and that's saying something. Starbucks was across the street so we hung out there for a while to use their internet and rest our collective feet.

We took a cab to the British Library. Everyone sort of enjoyed it, but not enough for the cost of the cab ride (11 pounds). The Tube station was not far

so we took the Tube back to Victorian Station then went to our B&B. I had to really care for my feet (anti-inflammatory medicine and balm). Jeffrey and Barb took a nap. Courtney played with items from her backpack. Several hours later, we went to the food area that was a few blocks away and eventually decided on Mexican. The food was very good, as were the drinks, but at the end of the meal; I couldn't



Me with the Rosetta Stone in the British Museum

get anyone to give a bill. In true passive-aggressive fashion, I built a three foot tower with glasses, straws and a lime wedge, which I used to display my credit

card. That got the attention of the waitress who asked: "So... you'd like your bill now?... and you're paying with credit?" Yay, message received.

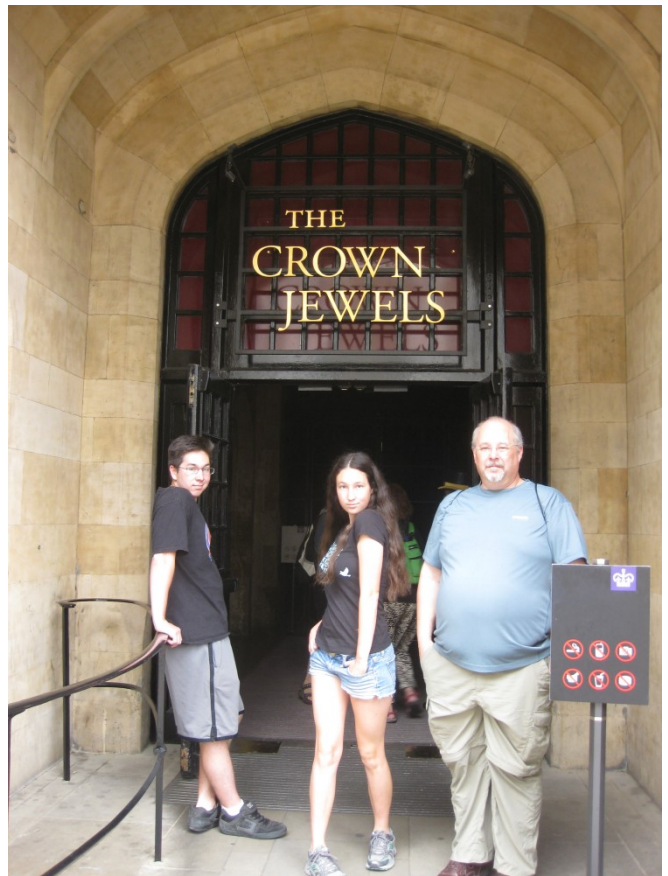
Our hotel was very hot once again this evening. I journaled, the girls went upstairs to use the internet and Jeffrey went to sleep. We logged-in slightly over 10 miles today according to Jeffrey's tracker. Tomorrow will be similar. I should get some rest.

7/2 – I was up at five. My feet were fine, surprisingly. I took a long shower but didn't realize that the drain was plugged. I got water all over the bathroom and five feet into the room. I cleaned up as best as I could with the available towels.

We made it to the Tower of London with five minutes to spare before it opened. We saw all there was to see in about two hours. I actually saw a little more of this place than I have on past visits, which was sort of nice. Usually, I'm rushed.

Next up was the boat ride to Parliament... except that they stopped maybe 3/4ths of a mile from where I was expecting to disembark, so we walked. The kids loved Big Ben. We next went to Westminster Abbey but the line was long and the price was 18 pounds each (yikes!). The kids really didn't want to go in so we skipped it and took pictures of the exterior instead.

I wanted to see Churchill's War Room because I had never seen it before so we went there. The line was long. The price was high, but at least it included audio commentary. Well, the commentary was slow and it slowed everyone down. All the corridors were small, so no one was going anywhere. It was



very confining. I got through commentary #6 before I got bored and took my headphones off. Hey, only 23 more commentary sections to go! After winding our way through the also very random museum portion, we headed towards the exit without our commentary. It still took another 20 minutes to get out because everyone else was so determined to get to the end of the commentary. We were now way

behind the pace I was hoping to achieve, so we cut some stuff

out (#10 Downing Street and monuments on the street) and took a shortcut through the horse parade ground to get to Whitehall Street. It was also now past lunchtime, so I thought we'd stop at the Clarence Pub by Old Scotland Yard. Both were under construction and closed so we went to a pub just down the street. It was excellent. We were all tired at this point because we had already walked 11.8 miles. Because of our mileage, we really simplified our tour of the National Gallery by finding a single painting: van Eyck's *Arnolfini Wedding Portrait*. It remains stunning to me.



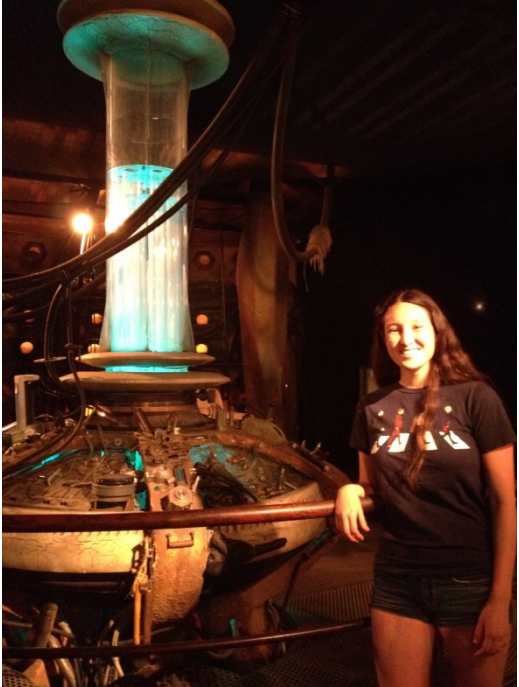
In Churchill's War Room

We got on the Tube and wound up on the wrong train (during rush hour no less). We got to **St. Paul's** eventually. Again, we shot only exteriors. We went across the Millennium Bridge to the **Globe Theater** but it was closed. Courtney was sad. Both Barb and I could barely walk, so we opted to skip the Tate Museum altogether. We took the Tube to Victoria Station and got drinks (smoothies



and iced coffee). Jeff and I walked to the B&B while Barb and Courtney got salads for a light dinner in our room. We watched Wimbledon and the original Jurassic Park. The kids were asleep by 8:30. Barb by 9. I watched much of the move alone in the dark while writing this journal. I'm not tired, but I sure am sore! Our final count was 13 miles, 24,000 steps and 44 flights of stairs.

7/3 – I was dreading this day because of British driving – I would have to learn how to drive a stick shift with right hand drive on left side roads as I drove to Cardiff. Things didn't start out well. For some reason, our credit card was denied. This is the second time this has happened on this card. We used our other card, which worked, but we'll need to figure out what's going on with our main card. I spent 20 pounds extra to get a Volkswagen Passat Diesel. It offered a smooth



ride, but that didn't matter too much early on because we were stuck in traffic and had no clue as to where we were (I am the family's navigator, but I was also the driver today – I can't do both!). No one was able to navigate and our Garmin, as it turns out, is USELESS in Great Britain. After 45 minutes or so, we found an A4 sign that led us to an M4 sign. After that, things were smooth and fast for 125 miles. Cardiff, when we got there, was totally confusing and had no signage whatsoever (a common problem in Europe). I had no idea where I was going because my iPhone's directions took us off the Google map I had printed from home. After asking a taxi driver (and after having seen the entire city it seemed), we got good enough directions to get us most of the way there. A local supplied the rest, though his "5 minute walk" turned out to be closer to 15 minutes.

Well, despite all that confusion, we made it to the Dr. Who Experience within 10 minutes of our ticket time, but without lunch. The Experience was awesome and very *Whovian*. Courtney was in Dr. Who heaven. It made me happy to see her so happy. She shopped for a very long time in the gift shop so we were late getting out of there. We grabbed a light lunch, even though we had no time for this, got lost on the way out of Cardiff, found the M4, found traffic, and had a flat tire. My front left tire hand blown-out. Fortunately, I was only doing 20 MPH at the time



due to traffic and there was an available soft shoulder. Man, those Germans really know how to pack a flat tire kit. I had the tire changed in less than 15 minutes, but then we had to drive less than 50 MPH for the rest of our journey. I got behind a car with a large boat on its trailer that must have been very unbalanced because the trailer would begin to fishtail at 55 MPH, so I stayed right behind him... for an agonizing 2.5 hours until we reached our Bath exit. He was my "boat buddy." We got hopelessly lost in Bath, which is dangerous because the streets are so tiny – essentially single lane. I got close to a lot of stuff. Since we had to fill up the car anyway, we asked the station attendant for a map and or directions. He had no map. He pointed us to where most rental places are... except ours. One rental place told us where ours was. We got there five minutes later, but the place was closed and had been for about an hour. A service agent was hiding in the back and he called a cab for us. I guess any damage claims will have to be handled tomorrow.

The driver got us to our B&B quickly, pointing out restaurants along the way. Our B&B owner was gone for the day but she had supplied us with keys via a lockbox. The room was four flights up and it was small. We were now very hungry. We had decided on Italian, but the place was booked. An English Pub? Booked. Hmm, it seems that without reservations, we weren't going to eat in this town. On our third attempt, an English "fusion" place, we found a table. We were underdressed for this fancy place, so they stuck us underground in a very hot room and fed us a very delicious meal. The price wasn't bad either for an "expensive" place. After that, we went up to our apartment, washed some clothes, and went to bed.

7/4 – We got down to breakfast a little early because we knew we had a long day and we wanted to beat the rush at the **Roman Baths**. The Standard English breakfast of bacon, eggs, sausage, tomato and mushrooms was very good and so was the coffee. We did indeed get to the baths early so we didn't have to dodge many people. The set-up and display was very well done. The Baths themselves were pretty awesome too. At the end of the tour, we got to drink some of the curative water that people throughout time had bathed in and drank (it cured leprosy!). It tasted nasty, like blood with many other flavors that I could only assume were heavy metals. I actually got a little sick because I had taken a big gulp. This passed though. We exited through the pump room, which charges for this water and went around the corner to where the free walking tour would begin. We still had a lot of time so we attempted to see the Abby, but church service was being held, so the girls shopped while Jeffrey and I scouted out where we would need to be tomorrow for our bus tour. We never found the specific hotel, but we knew we had the right area. We found the girls and the tour soon started. The group was large so they split us up into five groups, each with their own guide. Our group had Susan, who has been a resident of Bath for 25 years. Our group was still big at 28 people. She walked us all over town for the next two hours, showing us all the highlights of this city. We saw the work of an interior designer, a city planner, and a town promoter who all made Bath what it is today. We learned about the Romans, Saxons, Normans and Brits who all came



through here. She went through several Kings and Queens. This being Fourth of July, when she showed a picture of King George III, the Americans booed and shouted: "No taxation without representation!" The highlight for me was seeing a house on the Circus that had briefly belonged to Nicholas Cage. He had to sell it to pay back taxes to the U.S. Government. So sad. We also learned that Jane Austin lived here for five years and used Bath as the setting for at least one book (we know because she mentions details that we can still find here in Bath). As we were walking around, I was helping Susan plan her California vacation, which will happen in two weeks.





Georgian houses as seen from the Men At Work Museum

At the end of two hours, we wound up at the pump room again. Lunch was next so we went to a pub. Barbara had bought a pasty on the way, but she couldn't eat it in the pub (no outside food) so she went out to eat while the rest of us ate in. The bathroom in this place was neat because it was like a rat maze to get to – many turns and passageways. There was a reason for this: this pub was like most Georgian buildings: the main floor had a front and rear room. The second floor would have been a (with)drawing room for the women who, after dinner, would want to get

away from the drunk and smoking men, bedrooms on the third, and a maid's quarters on the fourth. The basement had the kitchen and there was also a cellar that went under the street out front because that's where the street "coal hole" was to drop coal that would then feed downstairs to the kitchen and heating system. So... these coal areas are usually converted to bathrooms (like the one I eventually found) because Georgian homes



Courtney resting in the middle of the Circus

didn't have indoor bathrooms (chamber pots were used indoors and there was a loo by the back garden wall, where there would be a door for the mucker to take away the poop).

Since our Roman Bath tickets also covered the fashion museum and a Victorian Art Gallery, we decided to see them next. The gallery was small but potent. My favorite was the Hugo van der Goes painting. We went up the hill to the fashion museum. Jeff and I had no interest in this so the girls went to the fashion museum and we went to the "Men at Work" museum. The place smelled like my grandfather's garage and had some similar machines in it too (my grandfather was a mechanic who also made custom parts so he had a metal shop and a wood shop.). The museum was a brass and "other non-ferrous metals" shop. The family that once had the business also made soda pop, which I think became their main business. In 1914, they made their own hand-built car. Jeff and I had some of their soda (or a near approximation), tried on Victorian hats, and then left to meet up with the girls in the Circus.

Dinner at the Italian place near our house was excellent (we reserved last night after we couldn't get in). Barbara had the best dish of the night which was lasagna. It was something really special. My dessert, an apple and brandy custard, was also very delicious. After dinner, we walked down the hill for our evening entertainment which was the *Bizarre Bath Walk* (a Rick Steves recommendation).



Making Soda Pop in the Men at Work Museum



Our guide was very funny. The kids loved him (which was important to me for some reason). He had all kinds of gags and a few magic tricks. It was a great time out. I liked his bit about optimism – the small Mormon temple next to the Massive Abby.

The town was alive tonight – it was Saturday Night. There were drunk people all over the place. Two drunk guys had tried to lead our group somewhere during our tour. Now after the tour, and all the way home, my family had to dodge people walking around unsteadily with beer.



Bizarre Bath Walk

7/5 – We ate our cold breakfast and headed down to where our tour bus would be. The streets were now empty and there was trash and broken beer bottles everywhere. We had some time so we ducked into a Costas and got coffee. Three small 18 person busses would be going out today (Maddie and her dog Max of “Mad Max Tours” owns these busses.). Our driver was Colin, a guy who had moved from London to Bath about 15 years ago. On the way out of Bath, he showed us where Jane Austin had lived for five years and where Salisbury Hill was – the place where Peter Gabriel had the revelation to leave the band Genesis (Gabriel grew up in Bath). He also mentioned a pizza joint where Johnny Depp and Nicholas Cage used to



pal around in. Outside of town, he showed us a pub where Charles Dickens used to frequent. We were now in Westbury County in the Cotswolds, the least populated county in Great Britain. It was the place of country mansions and of the very rich and very poor. Madonna and Guy Ritchie lived here for a long time. Every once in a while there would be a **white horse** etched on a mountainside made by removing the grass to expose the chalk below. The country views were spectacular. Along our route, we saw a couple of horse-drawn **Gypsy Wagons**, which were now rented by tourist families. We saw a couple of **canals with some old coal barges**. Again, most of these barges are now rented by tourists. All the roofs in this area are thatched. Thatching seems to be a lucrative

business. When a property needs to be thatched, the thatcher puts their “sign,” usually a metal animal of some kind, on the roof. That animal doesn’t come off the roof until the home owners finish paying. The longer the animal is up there, the more embarrassing it is for the home owner.



Finally, we got to **Stonehenge**. Our guide liked the way it used to be with a simple turnstile entry. Now you had to buy tickets and an audio guide in advance and get shuttled to the site. I liked the new setup because, while you used to be able to drive to it yourself, it was surrounded by a chain-link fence. Now that fence is gone.

The stones were exactly as advertised – impressive and mysterious. No one truly knows who put the stones here or for what purpose. Had it not been for its iconic status, I might have skipped it because it's just an odd arrangement of rocks. It is a solar calendar of sorts and possibly astronomical. There are two types of stones: Blue stones and Sarasin stones. Neither are local. The Blue stones come from 250 miles away and were floated down the Avon River to get here (Not the



same Avon as “Stratford-Upon-Avon.” There are many Avon Rivers in England. “Avon” is the Celtic word for river, so in essence, it's the river river. This Avon is the same one that flows by Bath where our comedian drowned a toy bunny last night.). The thing with the Sarasin stones is that they are four times as dense as granite and they have quasi-magnetic properties. Somehow, despite being exceedingly hard, the builders were able to shape and dress these stones without

any sort of metal implements. They used deer antlers and cow shoulder blade bones (and these cows were four times larger than modern cows!). They also dug a massive trench around the place using these same antlers and shoulder bones. Impressive.



The exhibition center back at the entrance had a nice display of artifacts and a **little village** c. 2500 B.C. The coffee shop had awesome Wi-Fi, which is rare around here. In the nearby fields, wild poppies were growing, making me think of Flanders' Fields.

Next stop was Avebury. As we were driving up, people were hugging the very large **undressed Sarasin stones**. It seemed like I was in Sedona, Arizona. Our driver confirmed that we sort of were. This was a one mile diameter circle of stones with a smaller circle (and town) inside. It was explained to us that this was a fertility site: have sex in this big circle (even in the grass?) and you'll have children. Give birth in the small circle and everyone will do fine. Our guide showed how these stones had



magnetic-like properties using two rods. It was cool to see the rods move. These rods were not ferrous, so I don't know what was moving them (I tried it myself and they were definitely moving). These stones, and the ones at Stonehenge, are along "ley lines." On the outside of this large circle, there was a 60 foot high embankment and ditch that would have been all white in ancient times (chalk). There were monuments placed where Sarasin stones had been taken for quarry – some of the buildings, like the

Norman Era church,

was made from these stones. Rumor has it that Ozzy Osborne has a small house here. Nearby is a chalk "step" pyramid like the Pyramid of Djoser in Egypt, except that the people who built this one didn't bury anybody underneath.

They did, however, bury the pyramid in dirt and sod. No one knows why.



Lacock, our next town, was a cute medieval looking town with only four streets that formed a square, and a rather large Abby nearby. The owner of the Abby owned the whole town for 400 years but after WWII, when taxes went high, the family donated everything to the preservation society, provided everyone lived in their houses as “renters.” This guaranteed that the place would be maintained by the government.

It was lunchtime and there were four pubs in town, but there were also many tourists. There was only one pub with any seating, so that’s where we ate. My burger was amazingly good. It then began to rain. We were hoping it would let up, but nope.

When the rain lessened, we ran across the street to the bakery. We got something gooey. The girls went off to shop. The boys went off to explore. The rain came down harder. Jeff and I did two laps around the town then ducked into a medieval “tithe barn” (where everyone gave 10% of their food-stuffs to the community). It was the one dry place in town and we were very wet. I wanted to get a picture of the Abby since *The Other Boleyn Girl* was shot there, so we walked there and hid under some trees until the rain lessened enough for me to run out and take my pictures. We then ran to other trees to wait for our bus group. They came soon enough, but Barbara and Courtney did not. After 15 minutes,

Courtney came running, saying that a shopkeeper had been talking her ear off and they lost track of the time. Barb came a few minutes later. Our bus driver mentioned on the way out that this town and the one next to it, which we had passed, were used for all the school scenes for *Harry Potter*.



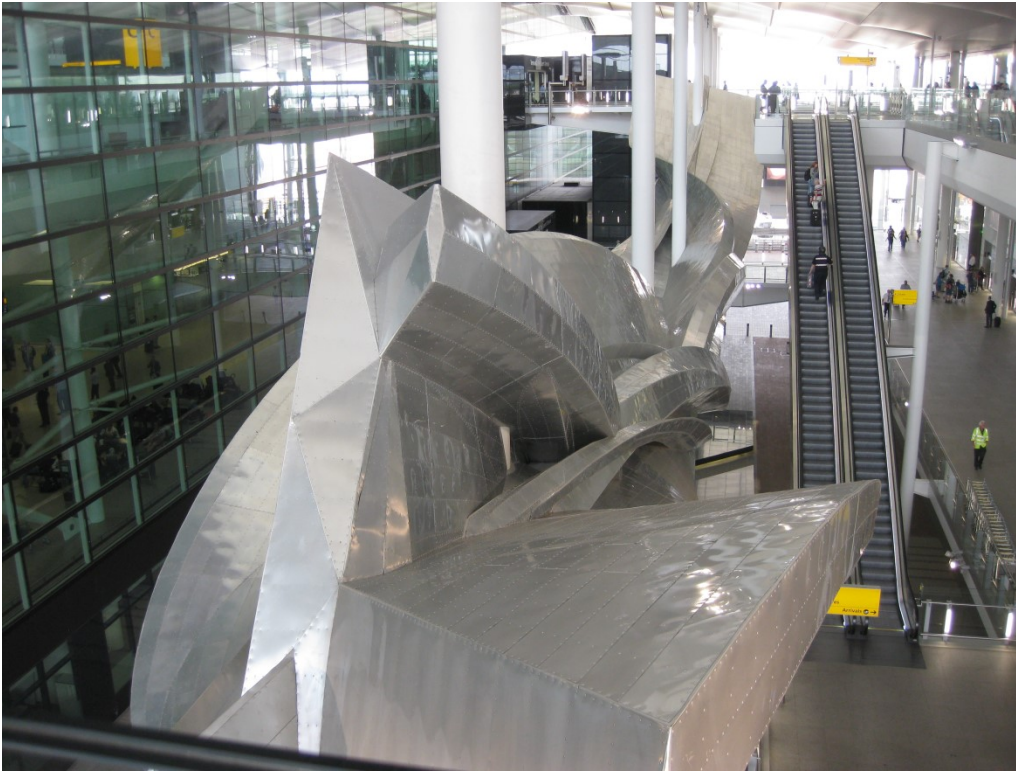
Our next and last stop of the day, **Castle Combe**, was used in the movie *Warhorse* and also in the original 1967 version of *Dr. Doolittle* with Rex Harrison. This was a very quaint and picturesque place (which is probably why they brought us here). The rain had also stopped so the sky was bright and the tourists had somehow vanished as well. For our guide, the top of this small town is where all the good stuff was. There was a market square with a “covered cross” (a stone canopy) for perishable goods. The Norman Church was lovely and included the **grave of a knight** who had died in battle. Around the corner was the **former manor** (now a \$1000 a night hotel) on spectacular grounds. It was so beautiful!



Colin took us a different way home so we could see one more chalk horse on a mountain (hey, we had a chance to feed live horses today as well) and so we could see the northern top of Bath. As we descended into the city, it became more and more familiar. Before you knew it, we were back at the Abby Hotel on the town square.

On our trek back, Courtney wanted to exchange an item at a store, but it was Sunday and all the stores were closed. Later, we went out for Thai Food, which was quite good.

7/6 – Travel Day #1 for home. We got up early and had a cold breakfast. Alan, our hired driver, picked us up promptly at 8. We talked about a range of subjects while taking in the scenery on the M4 as we headed to Heathrow. Before you knew it, we were there. The new “Queen’s Terminal” (T2) has a lot of great ideas starting with unloading – there are four banks of unloading curbs. I wish all airports had this! Inside, the machines dispensed our tickets and the tickets got us through an automated gate. Next up were several aisles to go through with counter space along the side with indented spaces where you could repack your luggage if need be. A lady was there handing out quart bags for liquids prior to the security check. The security check had conveyored bins to put your stuff in. If your bin got flagged by security, it was sent to a manual check station. After you got your stuff, the bins would automatically stack, go below on a conveyor belt, and return to the start. After the security check was a machine that took surveys of your experience.



The new Queen’s Terminal

The rating system was five buttons with pictures of a big smile to a big frown.

Our gate was a fifteen minute walk away, or so the sign said (we have got to get these signs into American airports!) and our boarding was in 15 minutes. Wow, we had certainly timed this well, but also very close. We got to the gate and there were a whole bunch of white people sitting in seats and a whole bunch of Turks standing at the gate entry, ready to pounce. I thought this was interesting because the English love to queue and the Turks simply don’t know how... and perhaps they would not need to.

Our boarding passes said “Group B,” so there could have been some sort of order, but this was also Turkish Air, and we were going to Istanbul, and up to this point, there has been no indication that they ever used this “group” feature. I watched to see which group would win. My money was on the Turks, and I was right: without any fanfare or announcement of any kind, some attendant simply dropped the rope and the Turks started boarding the plane. I quietly told my family to gather and go (but not so quickly and intentionally that we would start a stampede) and it worked: we got in with the Turks! So for Turkish Airlines, it pays to be attentive and follow the Turks who better understand this particular system.

The flight itself was uneventful. I saw a submarine movie (didn’t catch the title) and the latest incarnation of *Superman*.

I got in the absolute slowest lane at passport control so my family had to wait for me. Once through though, we walked out into the open air and in less than five minutes, our hotel shuttle was there. As was the case last time we were at this hotel a month ago, they gave us adjoining rooms at the same price as a “single suite.” Dinner at the hotel was not bad at all: I had my last kabob for this trip and an “Efes” dark beer from Ephesus. We were all alone at this restaurant because it was still daylight and it was still Ramadan. Our waiter spoke no English, so we did a lot of pointing and gesturing. I’m not entirely sure where our waiter is from. He seems Eastern European, and probably not Muslim.

With dinner done, we went to bed. Wake-up tomorrow will be at 2:45 AM which will seem like 1AM to us.

7/7 – We had succeeded in getting to bed early, so we weren't too tired when that alarm rang. Having been here before, we knew what to expect by way of transportation and food. This was good because the morning staff wasn't really on the ball. We were not handed breakfast boxes because none had been prepared for us. The staff, realizing this, had to scramble to assemble something. I think they grabbed random items from the (very expensive) snack wall and refrigerator around the corner. And since this



A T.V. Evangelist (?) was on at 3AM

was way before the first shuttle of the day, we had asked for a taxi to be ready for us when we got down stairs. This we had done last night with great assurances from the evening staff. No taxi. The morning staff called a few taxi places and no one wanted to come and get us because it was too early. So much for advanced planning. Eventually, a taxi showed up and quickly took us to Ataturk Airport. After security, we tried Nero's Coffee rather than Starbucks. Nero's is pretty nasty. I cannot recommend it to anyone. Stick with Starbucks or Costas. (When I was here in 2009, Nero's was a Gloria



A380 is a BIG plane!

Jean's Coffee place. Where is Gloria Jean's now?) As was typical for some reason, our gate was as far away as possible – that same last gate a mile away. At least we knew where to go. We loaded up on Turkish Delight at the big "I need to buy Turkish stuff before I leave" store (I love that store!). As was standard for this airport, we took a bus to the plane that was out on the tarmac. Today, rather than Turkish Air, we'd be flying on Air France. Unlike Turkish Air, they had no entertainment. How sad! Our three hour flight was pretty boring as a result. I wrote in my journal and listened to music. Our passage through Paris security was so much easier this time! When we got to the tram that took us to the various

wings, it was time to say goodbye to Jeffrey. His train was leaving to his terminal, which was not our terminal. He was going to North Carolina via Boston. We were on a direct flight to San Francisco. We said a very quick and very reserved “goodbye” to him, since we would see him in a few weeks in Arkansas at Barbara’s parent’s 50th wedding anniversary, and headed to our tram. And then we were three (and actually, Jeffrey couldn’t get time off of work for Arkansas, so we didn’t see him for almost another year! Had we only known, we would have been more effusive in our goodbye). Wow, we’re taking an A380 to SFO! This will be my first time flying this behemoth. The “A” seat (my “lefty” seat) had plenty of room! I’m usually jammed against the side of the plane in an “A” seat. I watched a bunch of movies and in just 12 short hours (nothing short about sitting in one place for 12 hours!) we were there. Our bag carousel after customs had a mechanical issue so it took a while to get our stowed bags (and yes, we stowed our bags on the last leg of our journey. It was free to do and who really cares if our bags go missing at this point – it was nice not to have to carry bags for a few hours in Paris.), but they did eventually come. Ray picked us up at the airport and took us home. We unpacked, did our laundry, went grocery shopping and stocked the fridge before heading to bed. It was a long day, and kind of weird, since we woke up in Istanbul and we would now go to bed in Milpitas, half a world away. That always gets me.



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