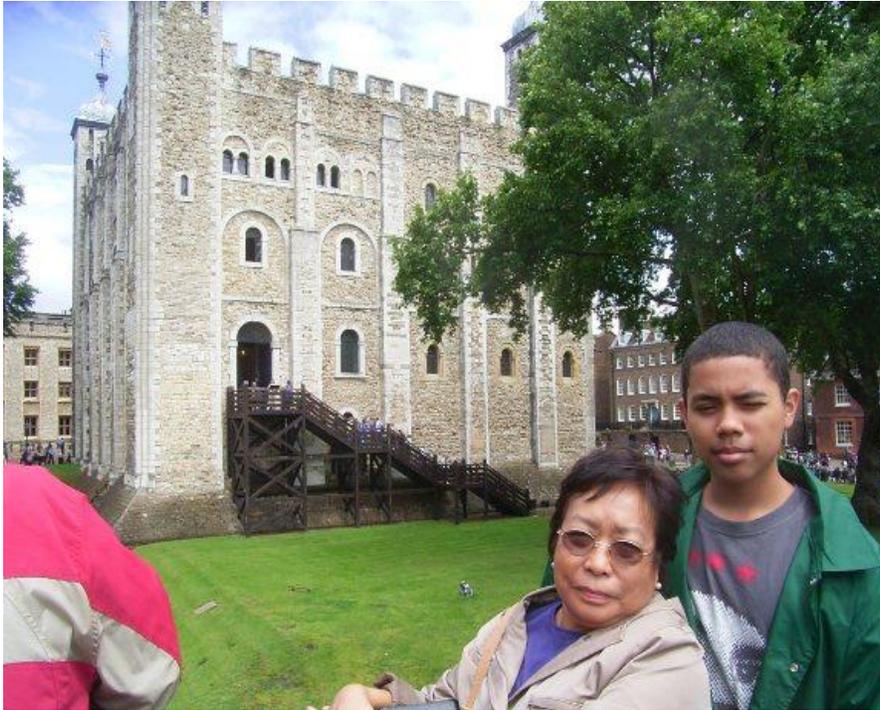


LONDON TRIP - The 7 day trip really was barely 6 days of tourism, as we arrived Thursday



evening just in time to check in at a hotel near the Paddington train station north of Hyde Park, and left for the airport the morning of the following Wednesday amidst the recent bomb scare, heavy rains, etc.

We took day passes for traveling via the Underground, or subway. It was easy and unlike NY, was clean and orderly.

On left is one of the structures in the walled-

in compound known as the Tower of London, started by William the Conqueror in 1078. You know the rest of its history, how it is where Anne Boleyn's head was chopped off, and has served as various roles such as a torture chamber, arsenal, royal residence, prison, etc. This was during the first full day in London.



The Tower of London is adjacent to the River Thames, shown on left. Behind grandkid Minky is London Bridge, partly hidden by the foliage. There were a number of bridges spanning the river. A fairly new one was only for pedestrians, and had there been time, I would have loved crossing it.

The best exhibit, especially to Lisa, were the Jewels, where most of the Royal jewelry were

housed behind heavy security. Too bad picture-taking was prohibited. I was amazed by the crown that had the Star of India, which still had a whole lot of other precious encrustations. I especially was fascinated by the treatment they gave the 1605 gunpowder plot of Guy Fawkes et al: how it would have been a much earlier version of 9/11 had it not been foiled. By early afternoon, we were done, so we ate at the nearby KFC. Food was about double the US costs.

Then we purchased a tour package that allowed us to hop off and on any of the Tour Line's double decker buses that run every 10 minutes traveling around the city in 3 circuits that totaled 80 stops, plus a boat ride. The bus ride, if unbroken, would take over 2 hours per circuit. At about 40 US bucks per person, this was relatively cheap compared to a NY tour bus, especially since it was good for 24 hours.



The tour bus' route meandered back and forth across the river, and after about 5 stops, we found ourselves at the Embankment where we got on a catamaran that went downriver and back in an hour. The Ferris wheel in the left background is known as The Eye, all 450 ft of it, inaugurated in 2001 for the centennial. Minky and I rode on it the next day, while Lisa spent time in an internet café nearby, as rides like that were not

her cup of tea. What was interesting was the running commentary by the tour guides, either prerecorded (as in this boat) or the live tour guides on the buses, whom I believed may be starving actors, with their wry humor and interesting accent. They talked casually about how Shakespeare frequented this part of town, as if it only happened yesterday, or how it was to be drawn, quartered and hung.



This is Piccadilly Circus, midmorning of our first full day, our first stop via Underground from the hotel. It is London's closest equivalent to NY's Time Square, but the big difference is there are no skyscrapers. We noticed the area cordoned off and found out that

night about the car bombs placed in the area. Later, it was teeming with people. Two other interesting areas, Covent Garden & Leicester Square were easily accessible on foot.



Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace, in the rain. This rain was the cause of the demise of my trusty point-and-shoot wide angle digital camera. This was after Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral, Oxford Circus, Harrods (where we just window shopped), and other interesting places. Even after all that walking, going back to

hotel 5 minutes away from the Paddington Station would always be preceded by a visit to the internet café nearby, which at 2 British Pounds an hour (US\$4.00) is relatively expensive. Our hotel was certainly better than the Etap hotels during the France Lakbayan (except for the bathroom which was just as small) but at \$180 a day for 3 beds, was relatively ok. Unfortunately, it had no internet facility, hence our daily visits to the internet café nearby, especially for our grandkid who still played his games. I, for one, researched to find the nearest source for a reasonably priced new camera. It was near the British Museum, which we had scheduled for Monday. One thing good was that all these museums are free. Tuesday was a whole day group bus tour to the countryside: Windsor palace, Stonehenge, and Oxford.



Above photo, on Portobello St, where George Orwell lived. Right, the Rosetta Stone, the British Museum.



Stonehenge on the left. The tight security at Windsor Castle on the right photo. A great tour, but no pictures inside. Oxford was great too.

Bye, bye next day.