



Visiting the Baltics ... and Beyond – United Kingdom (E18A-5)

It's a 10-hour flight between Las Vegas and London, and most of my flights to London have been 1-2 hours late (including, it turned out, both flights into London on this trip). Between that and the lack of direct flights between London and both Helsinki and Vilnius that lined up well with my Vegas-London flights, and I decided to bookend my trip to the Baltics with stays in London. Not that I need much of an excuse to visit London as it's my favorite city outside the US.

I ended up staying in London for four nights at the start of the trip and six nights at the end of the trip, giving me eight sightseeing days. I used these to take three day trips and take in four shows in West End theatres as well as to explore a few areas that I hadn't seen much (or any) of on previous trips.

Because this was my sixth trip to London, I've seen the expected tourist destinations in the city, most more than once. So although I did see some repeats, you won't see a lot of those destinations in this photo set.



Trafalgar Square



Buckingham Palace from St. James Park



A glimpse inside Buckingham Palace. For a period of weeks each summer it is open for tours, but I have never taken the tour.



It is believed that the famous Punch & Judy puppet show was first performed at London's Covent Garden in 1662. This Covent Garden pub takes its name from the show.



Soho architecture



St. Pancras Old Church. This is believed to be one of the oldest sites of Christian worship in England. Some believe that the site dates back to 314 AD, but the earliest archaeological evidence is at least a few centuries younger. In any event, the current building was primarily reconstructed in the 1800s. As the Reformation took hold in England, it was one of the last Catholic churches of that time.



The Hardy Tree. As a young man author Thomas Hardy oversaw the excavation of part of the graveyard in preparation for building what would become St. Pancras Railway Station. Collected headstones were stacked around this tree, which then grew among and over the headstones.



For all of London's historical buildings and sites, the City of London is home to a number of modern skyscrapers, some with rather unique designs. I took a walk through that part of town to check them out, including old favorite The Gherkin (30 St Mary Axe, left) and The Walkie-Talkie (20 Fenchurch Street, right), new since my last visit to London.



But the Leadenhall Market arcade also survives in that neighborhood for those who prefer more historic sites.



The East India Arms pub (left) stands next to the site where the headquarters of the British East India Company once was headquartered. Initially a trade organization, the Company gradually took over territories, including India, which it ruled until 1858. At one point the British East India Company was responsible for half the world's trade.

The Hung Drawn & Quartered Pub was named for the punishment handed out to some prisoners at the nearby Tower of London (although generally, um, executed at Tower Hill). A sign on one wall quotes Samuel Pepys (October 13, 1661), a witness to one such execution: "I went to see Major General Harrison Hung Drawn and Quartered. He was looking as cheerful as any man could in that condition."





The historic Tower of London with the City's modern skyline behind it. The fortress-like site was founded at the end of 1066AD by the Normans who had conquered England at the time. It was a center for Norman rule. For centuries it served as a royal residence. From 1100 to 1952 its facilities included a small prison. The crown jewels of the United Kingdom are stored here, and can be viewed by visitors.

It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. I've toured it a couple times in the past – this trip I took a photo walk around its exterior.



The White Tower, for which the Tower of London is named, was built by William the Conqueror in 1078.



Tower Bridge crosses the River Thames just downstream from the Tower of London.



The Monument to the Great Fire of London is 202 feet tall and 202 feet from the Pudding Street location where the Great Fire of London started in 1666. A narrow staircase inside the column leads up to a viewing platform, tall in its day but now hidden among a number of more modern buildings.

For one of my city hikes I crossed the Waterloo Bridge and explored South Bank and Southwark, not surprisingly on the south side of the River Thames.



View upstream of the Palace of Westminster and its Elizabeth Tower, more commonly known as the House of Parliament and Big Ben. Construction/restoration work was underway there, pretty much hiding Big Ben. This is one more UNESCO World Heritage Site. A royal palace built at the site in the 11th century was the primary residence of the kings of England until a fire in 1512.



View of St. Paul's Cathedral from "Ernie's Beach", a bit of sand along the River Thames.



This doesn't look like much, but it's the entrance to Pulse, a facility built in the arches underneath a railroad. It hosts the huge XXL club nights that I attended both Saturdays I was in London. I left around 330AM the first time, but my watch battery died shortly after I got there the second time – it was almost 5AM when I realized how late it was. It's been years since I've been out to the clubs that late, but XXL has great music and a big, fun crowd.



This was once the home of famous London architect Christopher Wren, who rebuilt 52 London churches after the Great Fire, including St. Paul's Cathedral. It at one time also briefly housed Catherine of Aragon, who would become the first wife of Henry VIII.



A modern reconstruction of William Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, near the site where the original theatre once stood.



Site of the original Globe Theatre



The Clink Prison Museum, at what was once the site of the Clink Prison, which operated here from 1151 until it burned down in 1780.

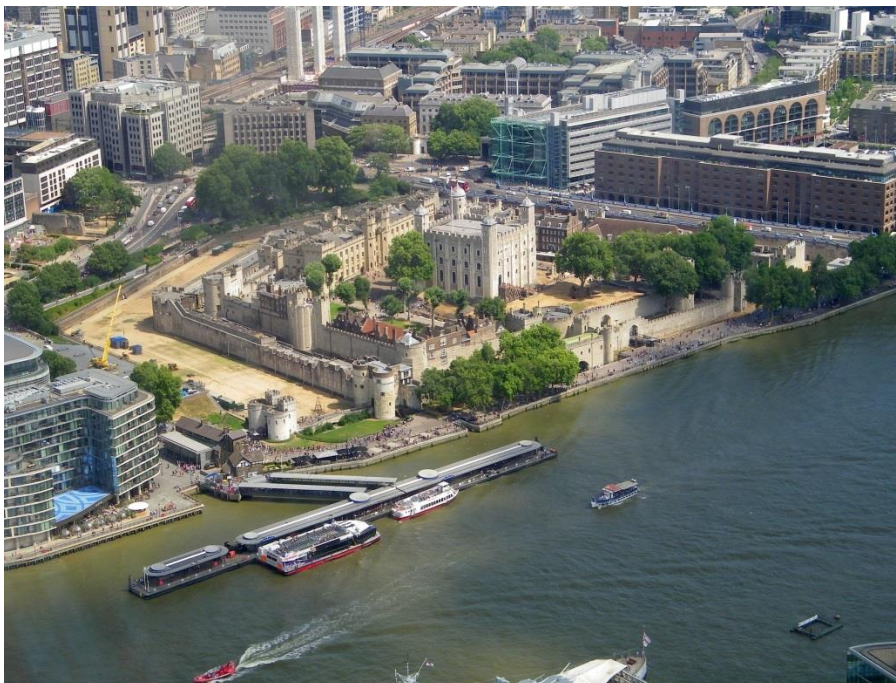
The Clink Prison was the source of generally calling prisons "the Clink", in case you wondered.



Southwark Cathedral, the site of Christian worship for over 1,000 years, although it's been a cathedral only since the early 1900s. The church has ties to William Shakespeare's family. John Harvard, namesake of Harvard University, was born in the parish.



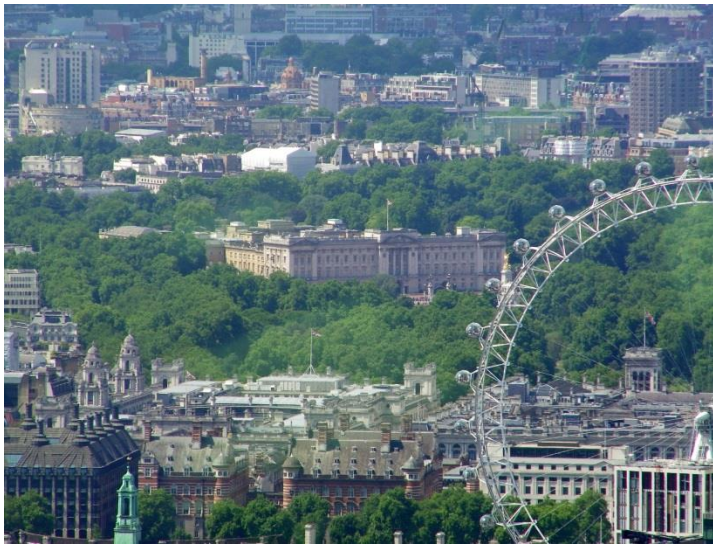
London City Hall (roundish building to the left) and the Shard, a 1016 feet tall skyscraper. the tallest building in the United Kingdom. The Shard has a view deck on its 72nd floor that had just opened before my 2013 London visits. I finally checked out the view on this trip.



The Tower of London, as seen from the Shard



View upstream of the River Thames towards Southwark (left), Soho (center) and The City (right).



Buckingham Palace and part of the London Eye Ferris wheel



Even the Shard's visitor bathrooms have nice views of The City.

And vice versa.

I hope you're not bashful.



My first day trip was to Brighton, a beach resort town on England's south coast. A Brighton street is lined with colorful houses.



Mmmmmmm! Mushy peas!



The Brighton Palace Pier features restaurants, an amusement park, arcade games, snacks, views and some shopping, not unlike amusement piers in Santa Monica and Santa Cruz, California.

The beach itself was more rocky than sandy, but that didn't seem to bother anyone.

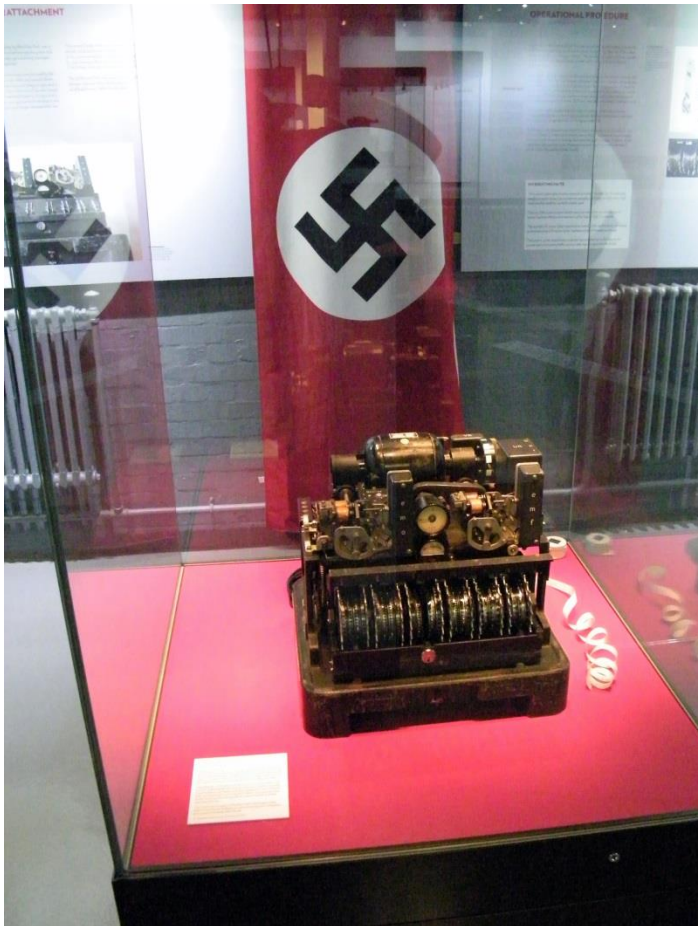


View looking west from Brighton Palace Pier. The spire in the distance lifts an observation deck to the top for aerial views of the region.

The structure sticking out of the water (center left) was Brighton's West Pier, destroyed by arson in 2003.



Restaurants, shops and other amusements line Brighton's beach.



My second day trip was to Bletchley Park, a former estate that during World War II was the headquarters of British efforts to crack Germany's Enigma code and then to monitor and interpret Axis communications in support of the Allies' war effort.

English computer scientist and mathematician Alan Turing worked there. He designed "the bombe", an electromechanical device that could discover the daily settings of Enigma through its transmission, greatly speeding up the decoding and interpretation of Axis communications.

Work at Bletchley Park also led to the creation of Colossus, arguably the world's first programmable digital computer. The first Colossus was deployed shortly before the Normandy Invasion, and ten were in use by the end of the war.

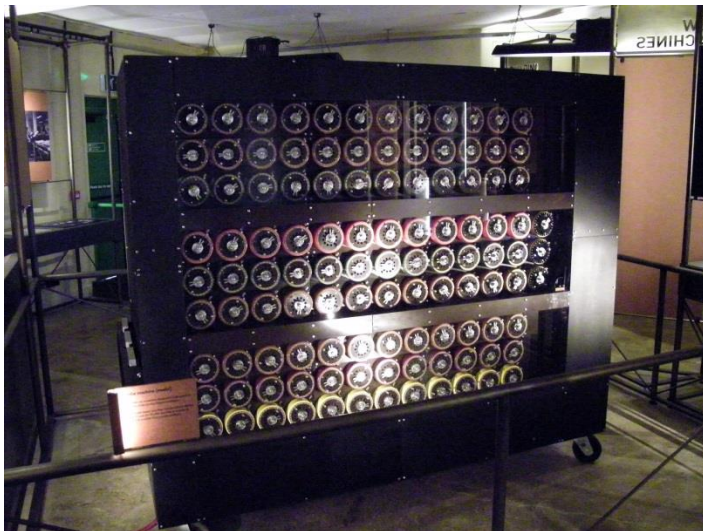


Alan Turing would go on to become famous to computer scientists, especially those working in artificial intelligence. Bletchley Park has a lot of information and displays on his work there.

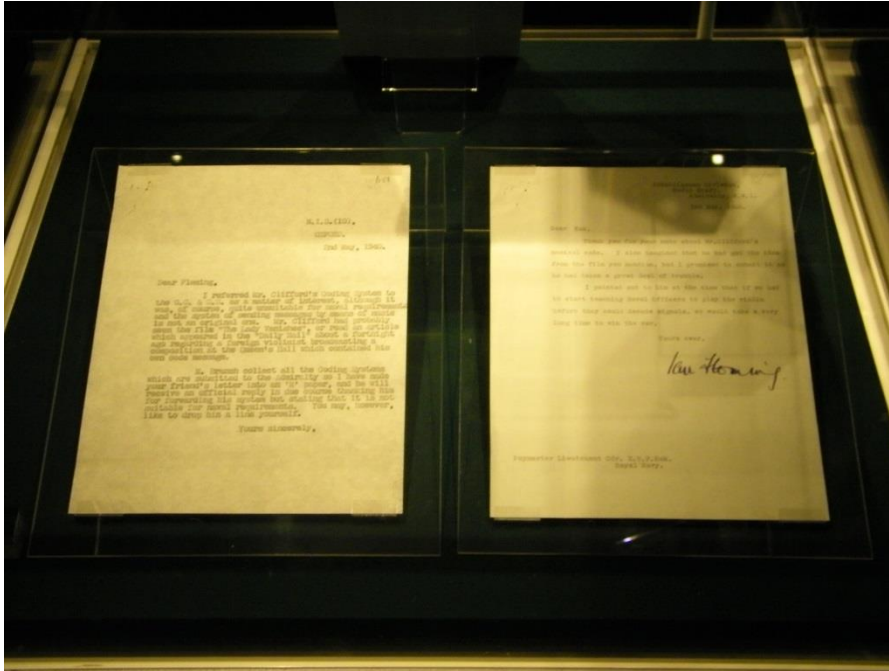
A statue of Alan Turing



Alan Turing's office at Bletchley Park



A recreation of a bombe



Intelligence officer Ian Fleming wasn't based at Bletchley Park, but he worked with people there during World War II. Fleming would go on to create James Bond 007 in the years after the war. There was a temporary exhibit on Fleming and James Bond at Bletchley Park when I visited there.



As long as we're geeking out a bit.... I came across this historical marker in London at the site where Charles Babbage once lived. Generally regarded as the father of the computer, Babbage originated the idea of a digital programmable computer, captured in his 1837 design of an "analytical engine".

My last day trip was to Aylesbury, an old market town. It has a classic market square and a smallish Old Town area.



The Kings Head Inn, Aylesbury Old Town. Parts of the building date to the 15th century, although the cellars date back another 200 years.



But Aylesbury first got my attention when I came across a news article about this sculpture, a tribute to David Bowie, a favorite musician who died in 2016.



So why Aylesbury? Turns out that Bowie debuted his Ziggy Stardust persona at Aylesbury's Friars Music Club. Aylesbury's market square (below) may also have inspired the "Pushing through the market square" line in the song "Five Years" on the album "The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars".





I checked out other Bowie-related sites back in London, including Trident Studios, Soho, where Bowie recorded "The Rise and Fall...." The Beatles, Elton John, Bee Gees, Genesis, Frank Zappa, Soft Cell, Queen, the Rolling Stones and numerous others recorded here as well.

Below is the Apollo, in Hammersmith, London, where Bowie last performed as Ziggy Stardust.





Other music fans visiting London may prefer to see Abbey Road Studios. It's famous for its first use of stereo recording back in 1934.

Okay, okay, it's also famous as the primary recording home for the Beatles, although numerous others have recorded here (Adele, Alan Parsons, Miley Cyrus, Depeche Mode, Michael Jackson, Elton John, Lady Gaga, Meat Loaf, Pet Shop Boys, Pink Floyd, Queen, U2, etc., etc., etc.).



Tourists pose on this Abbey Road crosswalk as they attempt to recreate the cover photo of one of the Beatles' albums, the name of which escapes me at the moment.



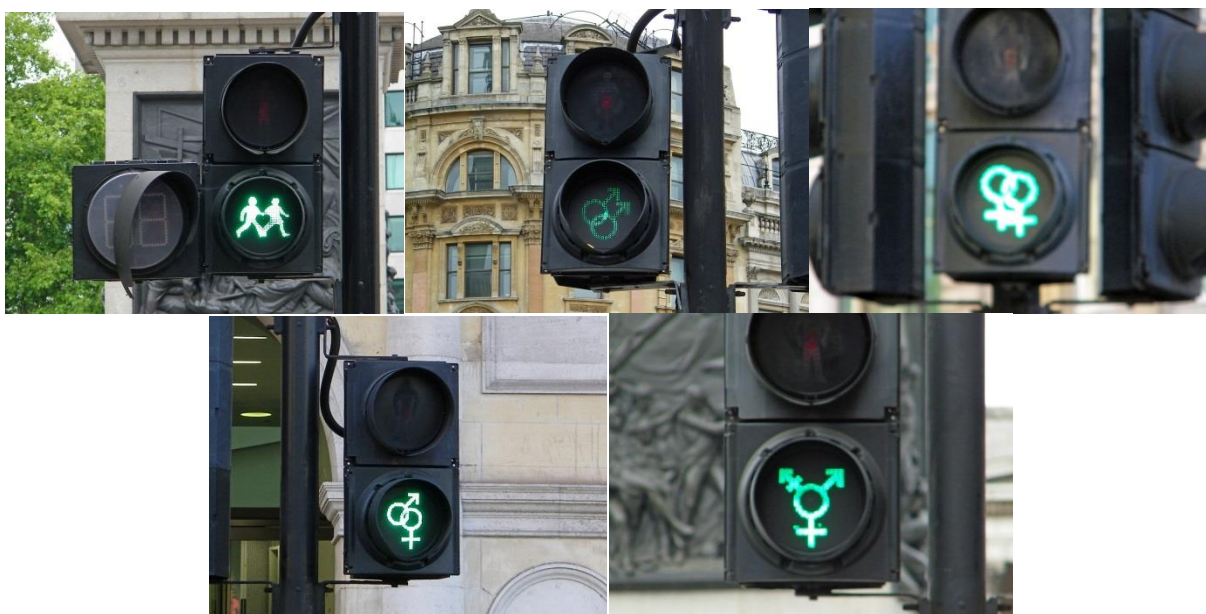
Speaking of Pink Floyd.... Roger Waters, Nick Mason and Richard Wright were students here in the early 1960s where they formed the band that would become Pink Floyd.



The toilet in my London hotel. I've got a collection of pictures of interesting toilets I've come across in my travels. This one caught my eye because of its square toilet seat design. I'm sure whoever came up with the idea for a square seat thought it was an edgy design. After all, as a square it has four edges. But this is a case where I think the user interface team should have studied their users more closely. I don't see how a square seat improves upon a traditional round seat at all. Oval toilet seats. Now that's where it's at.



If you've ever chafed under the patriarchal heterosexism inherent in typical WALK and DON'T WALK lights, you will appreciate how London has addressed this problem.



Stating the obvious



On the door: “At the Walk-in Backrub, you can literally walk in and we’ll rub your back. No need to book. No need to take your clothes off. Come on in!”

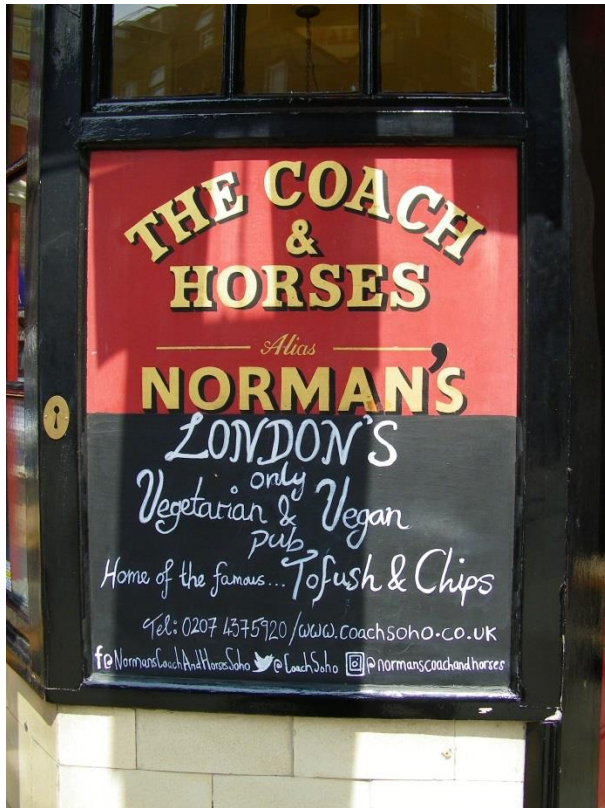
That’s the entrepreneurial spirit!



If you can find someone to rub your back, you shouldn’t be surprised that you can find someone to make your bed. I’m not sure how this one works, though. Perhaps you drop off your bed on your way to work, and it will be made for you and ready to pick up on your way home.



Over several trips to the UK I’ve noticed that the British people as a whole are quite civil. So I’m not sure why civil engineers need their own institution.



It's hard to believe that there's only one vegetarian & vegan pub in all of London. Especially when you can get the famous "Tofush & Chips" here.

Okay, so I can understand why some people might want to avoid various meats in their diet. But it always strikes me as odd when they go out of their way to create foods that mimic meat. It seems to me that it would be better to come up with dishes that make people forget about meat rather than remind them of just how darn good and tasty real meat is.

Just sayin'.



Before his summit with Vladimir Putin in Helsinki, President Trump spent some time in the UK. I wasn't there when he was, but I saw a number of references to Trump on various posters and in graffiti, all of them negative. It reminded me of what I heard about President George W. Bush when I was first in London in 2003.



View of the Aberporth, Wales area from my flight home



View of a glacier reaching the sea on Greenland's southeast coast



View of a glacier near Greenland's southwest coast



View of the northeast coast of Quebec on my flight home