

A Merrie Long Weekende in London!



American Presidents' Day? Fuhgeddaboutit! Ever the contrarians, we're taking advantage of the long weekend (plus an extra day) for a quick getaway to The Land of Kings & Queens!



This isn't our first time in London, but there's so much to see and do, we just keep going back. (This pic is from 2014)



It's a quick "hop across the Pond" as we settle in for the seven hour overnight flight from Philly.



Destination: The Holmes Hotel, named in honor of the famous literary detective.



And why, you may ask...?
It's right on Baker Street, not far from The Great Detective's legendary office [221b Baker]
There's even a statue outside the Baker St Tube station to honour him.



♪♪ Winding our way down on Baker Street ♪♪... Our destination: The Wallace Collection.



The Wallace family ancestors were genuine British nobility dating back to the 1700's. Over four generations, they amassed a treasure of priceless art, sculpture, and furnishings. In 1897 they left it all to the British Nation and now it's a museum with free admission!



The extensive holdings cover European arts and crafts from the 1600's to the 1800's. Art Nerd (and real artist) Judy loves this stuff.... me too!



Much of the furnishings are ornate Louis XIV French.



This little room was added by Mr. Wallace to showcase his larger paintings, including works by Rembrandt, Rubens, Titian, and Canaletto. Fabulous stuff!



Mrs. Wallace had a special room for her tiny Porcelain miniatures, many quite salacious!
This one (censored) was my favorite!



Valentine's Day was yesterday, but love is always in the air with us! (salaciousness, too)



It's a new day in London, and as you can see the weather is typically British.

(actually, nobody uses these phone booths anymore except to take silly tourist photos. Happily, Judy obliges me.)

But we're not worried about the rain, because we'll be spending the day inside...

at...



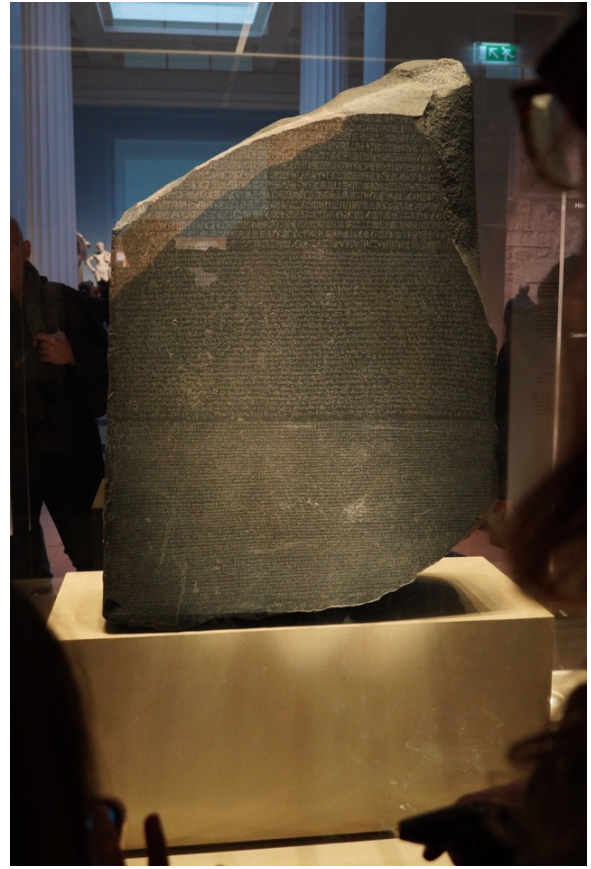
The British Museum, a showcase of archeological wonders dating from the dawn of civilization. Also with free admission!



The museum was founded by King George III.
In honor of Presidents' Day, I send him greetings from President George Washington!



The central courtyard was modernized and roofed-over with the translucent dome in 2000 to celebrate the millennium. It's a beautiful space to gift shop, grab a snack, or just hang out!



There are rooms and rooms of ancient Egyptian artifacts gathered over years of exploration, conquest, and sometimes thievery, including the famous Rosetta Stone.



The Stone was a decree written in Greek, Coptic, and Egyptian hieroglyphics, which allowed scholars to finally decode hieroglyphics. Here, I ponder its significance (& amazingly tiny script)



These giant Sphinxes are from ancient Assyria (now modern-day Iraq) around 3000 years ago



So is this giant lion. It's amazing how intact and well-preserved they are!



Here, the famous Parthenon Marbles. When the Ottomans ruled Greece, they gave the British Lord Elgin permission to remove, catalog, and preserve the statues atop the Parthenon. He took them down, but also took them home and kept them!



The workmanship is outstanding. The Greeks want them back, but the Brits will never budge!



Time for dinner! We hit the local Pub for traditional British fare: beef-and-ale pies with mash, gravy, and veggies. Hearty, delicious, and filling for only £12.50 = \$16.24.



And of course a pint of local Lager to wash it all down with! It's been a good day. Tomorrow we'll be up early for a road trip!



Day 3, and we're heading out to Blenheim Palace, birthplace & home of Winston Churchill. I admit I had no knowledge this place existed; it was all Judy's idea (she's also a history nerd).



Back in the 1700's, the PM's ancestor led the victorious battle over the army of despised & powerful French King Louis XIV. For that, the Queen appointed him Duke of Marlborough and granted him a palace. There's still a Duke—the Twelfth!—and he still lives there!



We've already been to Buckingham Palace (in 2014)....



And to Windsor Castle (in 2019)....

So.... another palace? I'm game! Let's go!



It's an hour by rail from Marylebone Station (pronounced "Mahl-bone"—I asked!) to Oxford.



Once we're about a half-hour outside London, we pass fields of grazing sheep. How bucolic!



We enter through the imposing front gate....



...and it's pretty awesome!! This is the front door....



...and this is the back. It's kind of chilly, but at least it has stopped raining!



The Duke's descendants own the castle outright through inheritance; but, unlike the Royals, they receive no support from the Government, so the admission fees pay for upkeep.



While walking the grounds, this male pheasant came strutting by. A guide later told us he was one of the lucky ones to escape “the shooting”, still an annual tradition sponsored by the Duke.



He's *really* lucky, because here's his harem! The females have plain plumage (unlike humans).



Entering the Great Entrance Hall, meant to impress! Here's a blow-up of the ceiling art. Wow!



There is a lot of gold leaf, to rival the Palace of Versailles of his defeated nemesis.



Paintings of former Dukes & Duchesses and their families cover the walls.



Can we stay for dinner?
(Donald & Melania Trump were hosted here—there's a photo in the current Duke's study)



Another fantastic ceiling, this one in the Grand Salon



The library, a cozy little space. At the far end, a huge pipe organ at the entrance to the chapel. Imagine young Winston Churchill growing up here? No wonder he felt he was born to lead!



In the chapel, the tomb of the first Duke of Marlborough.

Sadly, he died before the Palace was finished, and the Duchess saw it through to completion.

It's an impressive monument.



A little over-the-top, maybe, but he did defeat The Sun King....



Mark & Judy, still Living For Vacay—and add another palace to our list! What a great day!



Back in London for (what else) Fish 'n Chips. Tomorrow we fly home.... boo-hoo.
But even a short Vacay beats no Vacay at all!