

Dear Friends,

Here I am back from London.

I had to leave on the 3rd of August to be back on the 10th, and thus I called a friend of mine, Lucy, who lives in a town next to Southampton. At start, there are no problems, but when I decide to book a seat in the plane, about 15 days before, I realise there are no places at all at “decent” fares. I try with different companies (like Ryan Air, or Go!), but nothing doing, and at last I leave with an Alitalia for about 130£. This way, I have to leave on the 29th and be back on the 5th. Lucy doesn't exactly know if she can be free for that new period, and just to be sure I contact another friend of mine, whom I met in Finland, to find an accommodation in London too.

Just a few days before leaving, Lucy tells me she can't see me, so my plans change radically and I rely thoroughly on Nuria, my “London agent”, a Spanish girl (of course!); it's a pity I barely can remember the face of this girl, whom I just saw for a couple of hours in Tampere one night while I was with many other new friends.

Anyway, I get to the Gatwick airport and I buy a train ticket to Victoria Station. As I didn't know the service is made both by BR and Connex, I get a Connex ticket but I get on a BR train, and ten minutes later I get a 2£ fine for not having the proper ticket. “What a nice way to start”, I think, even because I had had a lot of problems in understanding what that girl wanted to tell me.

Well, I get to Victoria – an enormous station – and I search for the pharmacy Nuria works in: “Boots”. I find myself with four different Boots in the station, and it's quite hard to catch the right one! At last I get it, but now I also have to meet the right girl! Luckily, I cannot miss her, because there are three girls, but one is black, the other one is a typical English girl so... Nuria is what's left and I surely smile at her.

She's really kind, and almost without knowing me, she gives me the keys of her flat, with a map to get to her house, and gives me a rendezvous for the afternoon, after work.

The tube is obscene: there are a lot of lines, but sometimes they work, sometimes they don't; sometimes a train gets stuck, sometimes there's an accident, sometimes some routes are substituted by buses, sometimes light goes away... and there is NO air conditioned, so as you walk down the stairs, you start sweating a lot. Ah, of course half of the stations have normal staircases, so it's hard to go with a suitcase!

Moreover, especially in that period, the line I needed was closed for the Jubilee (but isn't it in Rome?!) and I had to use alternative routes which made me walk for about 20 minutes every time. Along the path, I ask more informations about a girl (I didn't know if I was missing or not) but I don't understand a damn, and only when I ask an old woman of about 80 where I am, I finally understand her.

The tube, despite all these problems, is very expensive and I spent a lot of money to get a week pass... London seems much more expensive than Finland!

The house is a quasi-typical English house; the WC is separated from the sink (for security reasons, they say), and there is no mixer in the sink.

The kitchen works with electricity, not with gas, and there is an ON-OFF switch (!), while the gas for the heating is regulated by a card with a chip you recharge at the post office. Same thing for the light, but you need a key instead of a chip.

I was also told English people use to eat in the bedroom or in the kitchen, and instead we have a dining-room too. I was in the "Elephant & Castle" zone, at the end of the Bakerloo Line, in "Long Lane".

As I get there, I sleep for about an hour, and then I go back to Victoria to see Nuria. She's very kind and we start walking in the city with an English friend of hers.

I've seen a lot of monuments: St James's Park, Buckingham Palace, Hyde Park, the British Museum (too big! There is half of Mexico inside, half of Italy, three fourths of Egypt with all the Parthenon's statues), Soho, Covent Garden, Piccadilly, The Tower of London, the Tower Bridge etc. English people seem to like the parks very much, and I found a lot indeed! They're all beautiful, enormous, full of little lakes and animals which run next to you, protected by a severe English law.

It's quite incredible to see how the monuments are totally left to themselves: they're always dirty, just like the city anyway. One pays to visit the churches, as the State is not responsible for them (it's up to the privates); the museums are all free. Everything closes at 5pm, even the cemeteries, and it's very difficult to see many things in one day. One of the things I liked most was the Tower of London, the Tower Bridge, Greenwich, St. Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey. Buckingham Palace isn't that great construction at all, and I didn't like it.

Much more interesting is maybe the description of the people who live in this city.

The English people are really strange! You can see them with tie and jacket running like crazy to catch the tube, and then act as if nothing had happened once they sit down; you see them throwing everything on the pavement, blowing their nose with their fingers.. a lot of anomalous behaviours. I met a boy, Stewart, nice and kind, but really racist ("We Englishmen are the best") and one night, in Vauxhall (not a very nice place to be, I was told), we were in his house. He showed me and Pilar our way back home, but we got lost and it wasn't a nice experience at all! We found a taxi, while a lot of people was asking us about drugs and so on, and that taxi company was ruled by a black, in a very similar Al Capone-style! When the driver told us his price and we replied we were told a different one before leaving, he stopped and started

shouting at us, so we decided to just pay more to avoid a bad end. Anyway, I got a little anticipated revenge on Stewart because on the previous night, while I was eating a very English dish, pork with honey, I spilt half of the honey on Stewart's bed...

I found a good friend in Pilar, another Spanish girl who lived in the same house with Nuria. We went to Greenwich, a very cute place, and the tunnel was really nice. We went to see the Docklands and Cambridge. It's a nice place, and all those colleges facing the Cam are really gorgeous!

I think London doesn't represent United Kingdom. It's too chaotic, too big! On the contrary, places like Highgate or Greenwich, or Cambridge give you an idea of a relaxing, interesting, calm England.

Of course, I was happy to stay in London because it's worth visiting it, but it's not a relaxing city!

Another thing I noticed in this city is the complete globalisation: the whole world is in London: Japanese, Hebrew, Jamaican, Spanish, Italian, American people live there. This is another thing I had never seen in my life before.