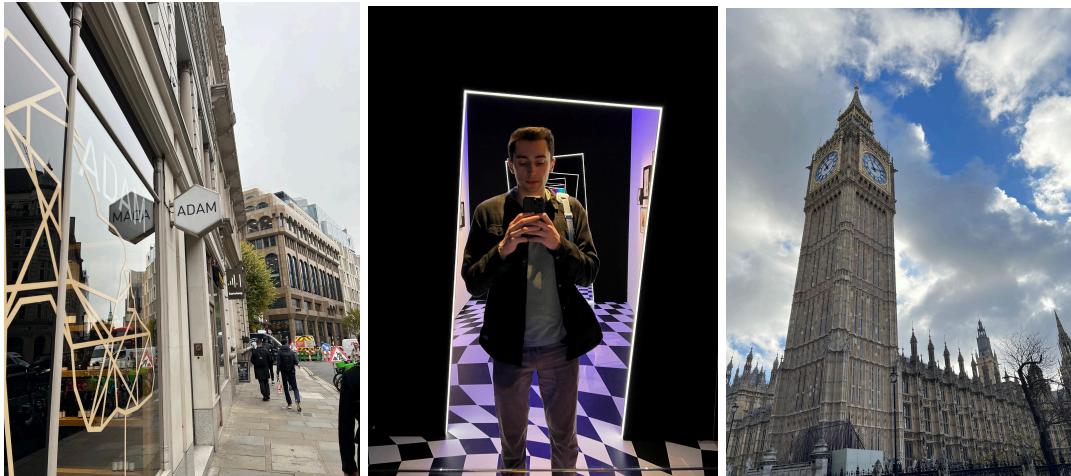


Adam in London

I went to London from November 3 to November 15, 2024. It was my first time in the UK and my second time in Europe. I stayed in the City of London, which is a small financial area inside of London itself, sort of akin to New York's Financial District.



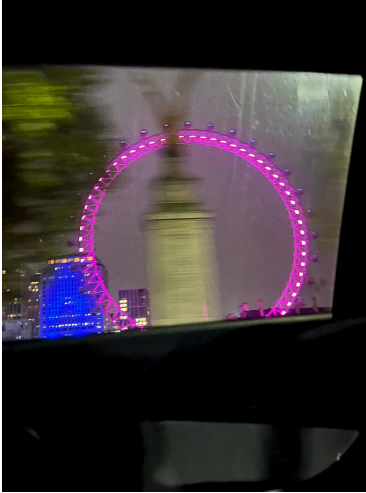
The first week, I attended a SANS security training on Enterprise Penetration Testing, and the second week, I worked out of the Bloomberg London office and met some coworkers from adjacent teams who are based in London.

While I was there, I noticed a bunch of things and learned a bunch of things. In a lot of ways the UK is pretty similar to the US, but in a lot of ways it's sort of a bizarro version of the US.

Observations

- It was my first time in a place where the cars drive on the left and the steering wheels are on the right.
 - It felt like I was playing Mario Kart on Mirror mode, where everything is reversed and all your instincts for how the courses go are backwards and wrong.
 - The weirdest part was honestly just crossing the streets as a pedestrian, where I discovered I had all these microreflexes for which way to look that I didn't even know I had. It reminded me of the [Backwards Brain Bicycle](#), the bike that's built to turn in the opposite direction that the handles are turned in, which turns out to mess with our reflexes so much that it's virtually impossible to ride (for a human who already knows how to write a bike, at least).
 - Luckily there were "Look Left" and "Look Right" (and occasionally "Look Both Ways") labels painted on some of the crosswalks to help with the reflexes. But then the problem gets pushed back to "do I know my left from right?" (answer: about 50% of the time).

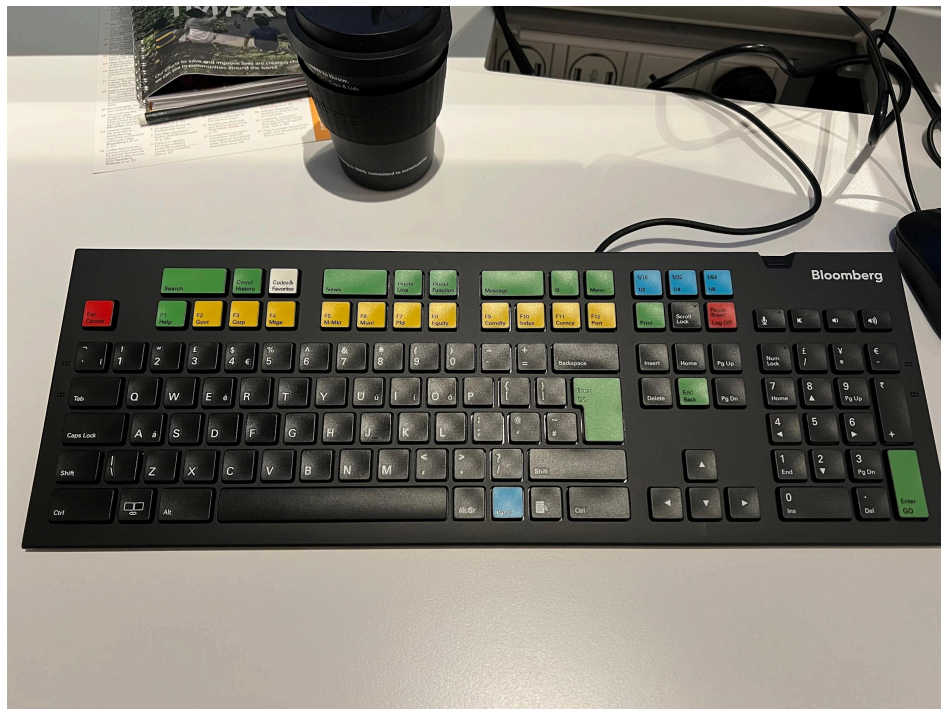
- One of the first landmarks I saw (on the way to my hotel, as seen in the awful motion-blurry photo below) was the London Eye, the Ferris wheel that I thought was a longstanding iconic London landmark. I would've guessed it was built in like the 1960s. Turns out it was only built in the year 2000! So it's existed for my entire life, but that's not actually that long.



- I took the London Underground (the Tube) all over the place! It's a super robust public transit system, got me pretty much everywhere I wanted to go, and maybe I just kept lucking out but it seemed like there was always a train available within a few minutes of arriving at the station.
 - They're not kidding about minding the gap. There is often a pretty substantial gap between the train and the platform, depending on the station. Not the case in NYC!
 - The escalators and hallways down into the stations are LONG, especially compared to the subway stations in NYC.
 - The platforms at each station are numbered, and there are sometimes multiple different platforms for the same train line at one station.
 - Instead of "exit" signs the subway stations had "way out" signs.
 - Even though everything is on the wrong sign in the UK, the escalators to the subway still had signs to tell people to stand on the right, just like in the US! Sometimes the signs were kinda screwed up though.



- When you're done eating in Europe, the waiter doesn't come over and assume you're ready for the check. You have to flag them down and specifically tell them you're ready to pay. At the beginning of the trip I forgot about this a few times, which resulted in me just sorta sitting there at a restaurant for a while, but I learned my lesson quickly enough.
 - Also they always bring over the little card reader rather than taking your card away from you. Apple Pay was eating good those two weeks.
 - The very first thing a waiter typically asks a table is "do you have any allergies?", which isn't a courtesy you normally see in the US.
- There were so many signs (especially on the Tube) about being kind and considerate to others! Things like being conscious of people who might have hidden disabilities on the subway, or encouraging people to subtly intervene by asking small talk questions if they see someone being bullied. Confirmed my preconceived stereotypes of British politeness pretty well.
- I had the genius idea to go to a coffee shop and order an off-menu London fog (you're in London, ya gotta!), which is an Earl Grey latte with vanilla. But the barista looked at me like I was crazy, and I quickly realized London fogs are very much not a London thing. Turns out they were invented in Canada!
- The British keyboard layout (which I used at work, and on my loaner laptop for the SANS training) has all the same letter positions as a typical US QWERTY keyboard, but the punctuation keys are all slightly cursed. This took a little while to get used to, especially the shortened left Shift key that I kept missing and hitting the backslash key instead:



- I went to a lot of bars.
 - London has a big pub culture, where throngs of people will hit the pubs right after work and stand in circles outside the pub drinking beers (presumably because

the pubs are filled up inside? Or maybe people just want the fresh air) even when the weather wasn't very nice.

- But most of the bars I went to were cocktail bars, or, as multiple of the bars I went to had in their names, "American bars"! This doesn't mean the bars are founded by American bartenders or designed to attract American tourists, but rather it refers to the style of bar that serves cocktails (which originated in America) as opposed to a classic British pub that's typically more focused on beer.
- My favorite bar I went to in London (and maybe my favorite bar I've ever been to) was Satan's Whiskers in the Bethnal Green neighborhood. I intended to only go here once and check out other bars on other nights, but I fell so in love with it that I ended up going four times. It's a classic American-style cocktail bar whose main gimmick is that they change their printed cocktail menu every single day, so there's always a new selection of cocktails to try (you can always order off-menu cocktails, of course). This means the bartenders have to have a truly encyclopedic knowledge of classic cocktails, and the bar itself has to have every ingredient imaginable on hand. Let's just say Satan's Whiskers was huge for my goal of drinking all 102 IBA official cocktails (I'm at 82/102 now), including the Porto flip, which might be my new favorite. Oh yeah, and it was ranked the [#29 best bar in the world](#) this past year.
- Passion fruit everywhere. It seemed like every bar and restaurant I went to had some sort of passion fruit dish or drink. I even tried plain old passion fruit for my first time during one of the lunches at the SANS course, and it was... pretty good, I guess. I tried to investigate if this is a British phenomenon but I think it might've just been a coincidence.
- Not only do the traffic lights turn yellow before they turn red, they also turn yellow for a second before they turn green!

Trivia questions

Vocabulary

Everyone knows that Brits call fries chips and chips crisps, but there were a handful of Britishisms that were completely new to me. What are the British terms for these things?

1. Coatroom (9 letters)
2. Stroller (one option that's a 4 letter word and then a 5 letter word, one option that's a 9 letter compound word, and one option that's just 4 letters)
3. Hospital operating room (7 letters) (don't worry, I wasn't in the hospital, I just met up with some friends of a friend who were all in the city because they work at a medical tech company)

Museums

I went to a lot of museums (courtesy of a lot of them being free for everyone, and courtesy of Bloomberg's museum access benefit for some of the ones that weren't free). Some of them I just walked around myself, but at others I lucked into guided tours. Here are some things that I didn't know until I learned them somewhere in London:

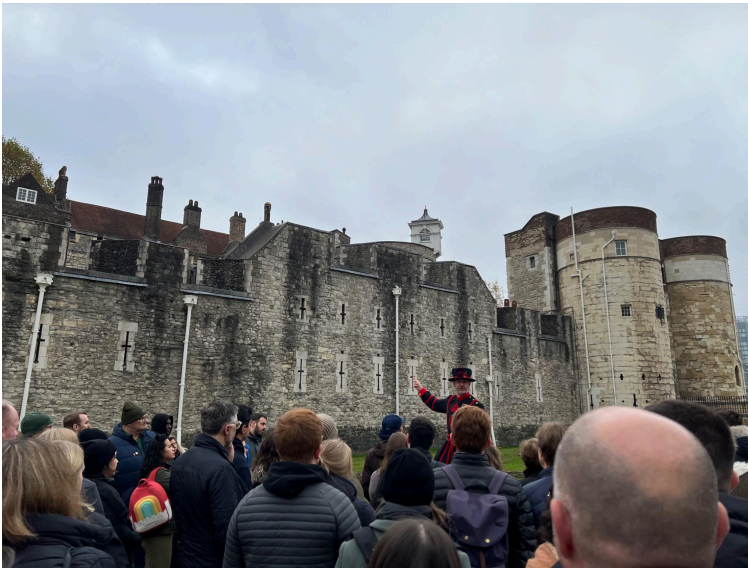
1. At the Tate Modern (where I went twice in my first week, because it closed an hour after my training ended and it was close enough to walk to), there were handful of paintings by a particular very-much-not-British abstract expressionist who was raised in Chicago and spent most of her career in New York and Paris. Who is this artist, who is not to be confused with a similarly named folk singer from Canada?



2. I lucked into a guided tour at the Tower of London with a very witty and very British tour guide, and I learned a bunch of things. The central piece of the Tower of London, the White Tower, was built in the '80s (the 1080s) for William the Conqueror, the first English king from what royal house, which derives its name from the region of northern France from whence they came?



3. The Tower of London is noted for being a place where lots of people were publicly executed. The last person to be publicly executed at the tower, Simon Fraser in 1747, was doing something peculiar right up to the point of his beheading, which is widely believed to be the origin of a common English phrase. What was Simon doing?
4. The tower's guards (and tour guides) are known by a certain carnivorous-sounding name that I had definitely heard before, but had no idea what it meant, and according to the tour guide, the name's origin is pretty much unknown. What's that name?



5. I spent an hour or two at the British Museum before I got sick of walking around and looking at a bunch of old stuff that the Brits stole from other cultures. There were some cool objects, though, like this Islamic instrument used for looking at the stars. I had heard the name before but never seen one in person. What's it called?



6. At the Victoria & Albert Museum, there's a wide range of very old and very new art, including this series of huge tapestries by Italian Renaissance painter Raphael. What is their title, a plural word that originally referred to art studies preceding more polished final works, but is now far more known as the name for a very different, more modern artform (one that might feature a very different, more modern Raphael)?



7. The Victoria & Albert Museum also had an extensive furniture collection, including several pieces by what renowned 18th-century English maker of cabinets and chairs, whose name is punned on in a titular pair of Disney rodents?



8. The Victoria & Albert Museum also had a fashion design exhibit dedicated to the influence of one particular British supermodel, the first Black model to appear on the cover of *Time* and *Vogue France*. Who is she?



9. The National Gallery, one of my favorite museums I visited, had a handful of paintings by a certain Italian painter whose last name I recognized because it's the namesake of one of the 102 IBA official cocktails. Who's that artist, whose eponymous cocktail simply consists of Prosecco and peach purée?
10. This guy loves horses! I saw several paintings of horses by one British artist at both the National Gallery and the Tate Britain, including his masterpiece *Whistlejacket* (pictured on the left below). Apparently he's really famous for painting horses. You don't get any hints toward his name, it just seems like it might be useful to know for trivia. Who painted these horses?



11. One of the most prominent English painters is John Constable, who also had a bunch of stuff about him at both the National Gallery and Tate Britain. His most famous painting, and one of the most famous paintings in British history, is called *The Hay ____*. What archaic/British four-letter word for “wagon” fills in that blank?



12. The Design Museum had a Barbie exhibit, including some Barbie dolls and Dreamhouses from over the years and some authentic costumes from last year's *Barbie* movie. I learned that even though every Barbie is named Barbie, the different Barbie head molds have different names. This one below has been used since 2016, and its name is a nickname for Barbie's official *middle* name. What's that name, in its full or shortened form?



13. Pictured below at the Tate Britain is the most famous triptych by a 20th-century British painter who I learned is very much not the same person as the 16th- to 17th-century British philosopher and statesman who served as Attorney General under King James I. What first and last name do these two men share?

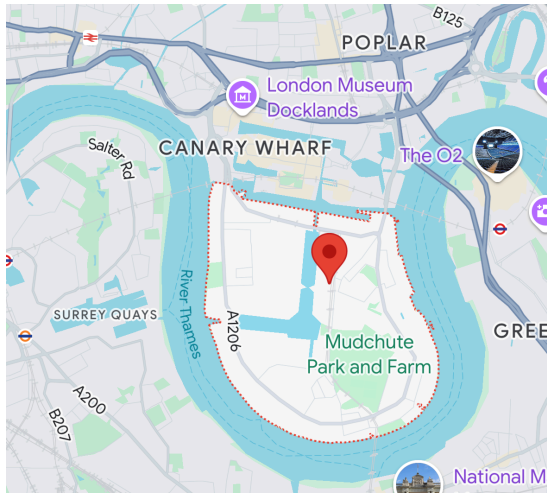


14. Maybe my favorite painting that I saw on the entire trip was *A Bigger Splash*, a 1967 pop art painting by British artist David Hockney. After looking up this painting because I loved it so much, I learned that it lends its title to a 2015 film, the second in its director's *Desire* trilogy, which started with 2009's *I Am Love* and ended with what very popular 2017 film?



Miscellany

1. I feel a certain loyalty to Walgreens, since they're headquartered in my hometown of Deerfield, Illinois. In NYC, the Walgreens stores typically assume the brand of the Walgreens subsidiary Duane Reade. But in London, the Walgreens-esque pharmacies on every corner belong to what Walgreens' sister brand, the B in their stock symbol WBA (Walgreens ____ Alliance)?
2. This little section south of central London's Canary Wharf is actually a peninsula, despite its name, which it also lends to the title of a 2018 animated movie. What's that name, which also hints at the etymology of Canary Wharf itself?



3. You've heard of fish and chips, you've probably heard of bangers and mash, but you've probably not heard of bubble and squeak, the British dish consisting of what two vegetables, mashed together and fried?

Conclusion

Thanks for reading! I'd love to go back to London sometime, mainly so I can go back to Satan's Whiskers. For answers to the trivia questions, see [here](#).