

A Realization that One Destination Will Never Be Enough: A Day in Bath, England

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Like most members of the millennial generation, I have dreamt of travelling the world since I was a child. The intrigue of history has always cast a spell on my every thought, beckoning me to journey to new destinations and have new adventures. When I started studying at East Tennessee State University in the fall of 2014, I knew that it was time to start pursuing this dream on my own. As a child and young adult, I was fortunate to have been given several



The author (left) and fellow Honors student and friend, Shelby

opportunities to travel with my own family.

As rewarding as those experiences were, I knew that I would continue to wander, unsatisfied, until the day that I die.

During my freshman year, I was offered the chance to study art history for two weeks in London during the summer of 2015

by one of my professors in the Fine and Performing Arts Honors College. I knew that it would be the perfect beginning to a new era of adventure. I felt as if the trip met a good set of criteria (short length, English speaking country, professor that I knew, etc.) for my first study abroad trip with ETSU, so I began the process of enrolling myself in the class.

When I found out in January of 2015 that I would definitely be going on the trip to London, the City of Bath, England instantly became one of the places that I had to see. As a

loyal Jane Austen devotee, I knew that I would do whatever it took to catch a glimpse of the city's curved walls and ancient Roman remains while in England. Luckily, it wasn't that difficult of a dream to realize. One day off from the endless museums visits (it was an art history class, indeed) and two train tickets was all that my friend and classmate Shelby and I needed to journey away from the rest of our class. The day was a much needed vacation away from hectic London; the City of Bath drew us back in time and comforted us with her history.

"Why do adventures have to begin so early in the day?" I asked Shelby as we pulled out ourselves out of bed before the majority of London was awake that Thursday morning; the alarm clock had starting blaring at 4:30 AM. We donned our usual black and gray garments, added some red lip stick, and sleepily packed everything we thought we would need for the day into my



Waiting for the tube in Sloane Square Station, Chelsea

maroon Patagonia backpack.

We were out the door by 5:00 AM, as our train was scheduled to depart from London Paddington Station at 7:00. Like we did during all of our days in England, Shelby and I began the morning with a groggy tube ride out of Sloane

Square full of unquestionably exhausted travelers. Our train ended up being an hour later than we had expected, so we spent our extra time wandering the station; we found the iconic Paddington Bear statue, and, as always, followed our noses to the nearest coffee venue. Living in a city full to the brim of wonderful coffee and tea shops, Shelby and I were beginning to find that Starbucks just didn't cut it anymore, but that still didn't deter us from getting caramel macchiatos from the double tailed mermaid that morning.

Our train finally arrived after we had attempted to stay awake on the platform for over an hour. The distance to Bath was about 100 miles -- 2 hours on the train. As we began to jet out of London, my excitement kept me from falling asleep like most of the other passengers on board. We sped past central London, through Suburbia, and eventually, the slums of the city. Before I knew it we were sailing through field of green towards our destination. The English country side presented us with views of rolling farms and hills and enough adorable little cottages to keep any fairytale lover content. Upon our arrival, sleepy and excited voyagers alike stepped out of the train and into the city of Bath. As we crossed the canal into the lower city, I couldn't help falling in love with a day that had not even happened yet.

As breakfast and brunch addicts, Shelby and I headed straight for the first open café that we found. Unlike many of the coffee shops we had been in in London, our destination had a neighborly feel to it. Everyone seemed to know each other, but more importantly, everyone seemed to be enjoying their coffee. Two lattes later, we were back out on the road. We meandered through alleyways filled with creeping vines of periwinkle flowers, enjoying the



Looking down onto the Kennet and Avon Canal

peace and quiet that was so different than the business of London. After spending some time wandering through the lower part of the city, we began our ascent into old Bath. We stayed with the Kennet and Avon Canal, which runs throughout the City of Bath from Bristol, finding frolicking mutts and even a swan with newly hatched bundles of soft white feathers by the water.

The first glimpse that I caught of the Bath Abbey was absolutely breath taking. The religious center was originally built in the seventh century, but it was redone multiple times before it took on the Georgian Gothic style that it presents today. The Roman Bath house sits directly next to the Abbey. The Roman Empire built the Bath house in the valley in 60 AD because it was said that hot springs in the area had restorative properties. From the time that it was built, the house invited the weak and the weary to bathe in its waters. The popularity of the



The bath's pools were once full of bathers from across Europe

baths during the Georgian Era influenced the rest of the city's architectural style and the novels of Jane Austen, who spent many years living in the city.

“Don't you just feel like after we walk through we'll be off to buy the newest

and trendiest hat ribbons and to go to the ball?” I pestered at Shelby as we waited in line for our turn to walk through the bath house's history. I couldn't help but to think of the Georgian social scene that reminded me so much of the works of Austen, and of just how many people had travelled to that plot of earth. The floors in the entire bath were sloped inwards where so many people had walked upon the same path. Many had come hoping to be healed, while others in more recent history had arrived for the society, but they were all there. All of these lives and souls that we can't even imagine were at some point standing in the very spot that I stood. This realization was just as stunning as the bath's timeless architecture and green waters that were once full of bathers. The structure contained an amazing amount of history, and it was set up so that even the most clueless visitors could learn about the years that they were walking through. When the baths were originally built, the Romans mostly separated the house by gender. Each

gender would have had sets of rooms to relax in: hot baths, cold baths, massage rooms, steam rooms (much like modern day saunas), and the equivalent of a modern day locker room. Visitors were able to see this history by touring through several small baths and steam rooms as well as the enormous outdoor pool. Water still trickled over worn stone, and rooms missing their floors revealed the small brick pillars that allowed heat to pass through underneath the feet of the bathers.

Staying true to its history, Bath is still brimming with day spas and salons, but it is also home to stores and restaurants galore. After visiting the Abbey and Bath, Shelby and I spent the rest of the day meandering through stores that we couldn't afford anything from (Anthropologie really needs to look at lowering their prices for me), falling in love with every new sight we saw, and wanting to spend every last pence we had on crêpes and coffee. The streets were crowded with Fiats and people from every edge of the earth exploring just like we were, and every corner held a new store that we just had to enter.



Focusing on the Bath Architecture made time disappear

After lusting over expensive shoes and baked goods, we wandered towards The Circus: an iconic architectural and spiritual center of Bath. It uniquely displays Bath's famous Georgian curved apartments in a whole circle, complete with a road through the center, a bright

green lawn, and an overflow of floral window boxes. The Bath Circus is picturesque in that if you can focus on a section without any traffic or tourists, you can be in any time period you

choose. The flats are still habitable (and adorable), and their cast iron rods and warm neutral walls invite every eye that glances over them to wonder about their histories.

Shelby and I spent the rest of our afternoon exploring the park that lay down the hill from central Bath; stretching lawns and creeping blooms inhabited every inch of our sight. As fellow art and literature students, we meandered through the gardens quoting Wordsworth and Keats.

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty”¹ had been one of our favorite Keats quote since we studied



British poets at ETSU earlier in the year, and now we were seeing all of this beauty in the nation where our favorite poets had lived. All of these little realizations added our own versions of allure to our trip in England.

Our day fled by until we, exhausted but ecstatic, realized that it was time to return to the station. As we had wandered randomly throughout the entire day, it took several maps and a few friendly locals to get us back by

the canal. While waiting for our departure, we grabbed one last cup of tea in a café across the street from the station. My little blue ceramic pot of chai was the last picturesque memory of the city; I find myself thinking of it every time that I envision that day in my mind.

While returning to London that night, I kept thinking about how visiting the city of Bath was a point of realization in my life. I would not label it as an epiphany, because it was a feeling that I always knew dwelled within me. My body longs to be everywhere and see everything, and it was in Bath that I really knew that I would always choose an experience over anything

material. I have lived my whole life waiting to be able to give into my case of wanderlust. Bath was such an exciting destination because it was the first time that I got to experience travelling as an independent adult; I'm proud of how I experienced the day without any fear. As I was riding back to Paddington Station, I couldn't stop thinking about my day in Bath and how I have my entire life to leave different destinations feeling the exact same way that I did in that moment: fearless and adventurous and utterly happy.

Image 1: Taken of Zoë Hester and Shelby Maiden in the City of Bath by Zoë Hester

Image 2: Taken in Sloane Square Station by Zoë Hester

Image 3: Taken in lower Bath by Zoë Hester

Image 4: Taken in the Roman Bathhouse by Zoë Hester

Image 5: Taken in the Bath Circus by Zoë Hester

Image 6: Taken of the author in upper Bath by Shelby Maiden

ⁱ From John Keat's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," 1819