

## **LONDON TOUR 2017**

### **Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> September (Katie Daly)**

Driving to Kerry airport the atmosphere was electric. Fifty Mercy Mounthawk students crammed into the small waiting area in Farranfore airport, then bustled onto the Ryanair plane and flew silently over the Irish sea to Gatwick airport: our sixth year school tour to London had begun! Miss Thornton had begun planning our sixth year school tour to London last January and it was finally happening.

We proceeded off the plane in a gale of laughter towards the most glamorous bus I've ever been on. En route to Trafalgar Square we drove past soaring skyscrapers, staring in awe at the cityscape of London. At 8pm we arrived at the National Gallery. Although time was tight, I loved this venue. One room was based on a gentleman who took about three hundred photos of himself, each picture revealing a different emotion. I was in awe of every slight alteration in facial expressions.

After a very relaxing stroll around the gallery, we returned to the city air to find our way to Pizza Express. Any passer-by could tell that we weren't native Londoners as fifty starving Kerry teenagers stormed into the restaurant. I ate a steaming lasagne and ice cream until not a morsel was left.

By 11pm we had reached our accommodation in Elephant and Castle. Exhausted from excitement and travel, we fell asleep as soon as we collapsed on our beds. I couldn't have asked for a better start to our weekend in London

### **Friday 15<sup>th</sup> September (Sally O'Mahony)**

Early Friday morning, we awoke, bleary-eyed to the bright London sunlight peeping through the curtains. The sluggishness didn't linger too long however, as we were all very excited for the day's itinerary.

We had a relaxing breakfast at 8:30am and hopped on our private bus for the city excursion. Our first activity of the day was an exclusive tour of Buckingham Palace. On arrival, we suddenly realised just how lucky we were to be experiencing this visit, as big crowds had gathered outside the front gates in an attempt to look in.

Buckingham Palace was the most elaborate, exquisite place I had ever been in in my life. The ceilings dripped with crystal chandeliers, most of the rooms were carpeted in rich crimson velvet, and almost everything seemed to be filigreed with gold. We meandered around the many lavish rooms and pondered the infinite portraits. There were also exhibitions throughout, such as a display of honorary gifts to the Queen from foreign countries and an anniversary dedication to Princess Diana. Afterwards, we went outside to the back of the Palace for a mandatory tourist photoshoot. There was also a gift shop, where we bought souvenirs from our once-in-a-lifetime trip.

Afterwards we had lunch, and at 12:30pm we went to Shakespeare's Globe Theatre to attend a performance of King Lear. This was one of my favourite experiences of the entire trip. The performance was incredible; it was so different than anything we had ever seen portrayed before, but the theatre was amazing. The building had been constructed so authentically that there was little doubt it was almost an exact replica of the original Shakespearean Globe. This made the experience so unique as you felt as though you were a medieval noble!

After the performance, we were all exhausted- and it was only 4:30pm!

Our next trip was a guided bus tour around London city. We saw and learned about London's many different buildings, sights etc. such as Big Ben, the Houses of Commons, and Westminster Abbey to name but a few.

The bus tour ended at Westfield Shopping Centre. My friends and I bolted straight passed Louis Vuitton, Prada and Burberry and headed straight for the heavenly scent of Nandos! After the delicious dinner, we frenzied around the shopping centre until our arms sagged with the weight of heavy shopping bags.

Our purses considerably lighter, at 9:45pm we hopped on our bus and travelled through the lit-up city back to our hostel.

We were exhausted when we returned to the hostel for 11:30pm, as would anybody after a 14-hour day of activities!

But that day was one of the most amazing experiences ever, not only for my friends and I, but for everybody on the trip.

### **Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup> September (Rachel Deasy)**

It was an early morning: 6.30am. Alarms were ringing. Showers firing. Clothes flying. Toothpaste foaming. And most importantly for some; make-up applying!

By 8.45 we were all on the bus making our way back to the Globe Theatre where we received a guided tour from jovial Londoner. We got a chance to experience watching a play from a groundling's perspective; teachers and students alike were squashed together like sardines. After a very entertaining tour, we visited the Globe gift shop. Ms. Buckley made great use of 'Shakespeare's Insults' – on students! The teachers left at home weren't completely forgotten. Mark McDonnell purchased a 'Nothing Will Come of Nothing' magnet for Ms. Bunce. Before we bid farewell to the Bard's Globe, Mr. O'Roarke presented Ms. Thornton with a small gift as a thank you from all of us, which was followed by a thunderous applause.

By 11am we were back on the bus and within half an hour were on the threshold of the London Dungeon. There we learned of the seedy underbelly of London and had a couple of laughs at each other's expense, with Nessa locked in a cage, Phillip the guinea pig for torture devices and Miss Thornton screaming when 'Jack the Ripper' appeared a foot in front of her face. But the best part of the tour had to have been the courts when poor Mr. Redican was put on trial – and found guilty!

Running late, we rushed back to the bus and 'flew' to the Apollo Victoria Theatre just in time for the performance of 'Wicked'. It was an incredible production which had myself, and more than a few others, mouthing along to 'Gravity' and 'Popular'. By the end of the show, we all agreed that the entire day had ben 'wicked'! And it wasn't over yet.

Next was a quick stop at Café Rouge, where we all devoured our meals to the soundtrack of forty students chattering excitedly.

At 7.30pm we walked through the doors of the Tate Modern. Everyone promptly scattered and I ended up getting a tour of the second floor from Mr. Redican. I was captivated by Claude Monet's 'Waterlilies' and could have stayed there for hours. But we were soon off again to the final part of our day's itinerary: the part I had been most looking forward to: Jack the Ripper.

It was amazing! Our tour guide Sinead, a Killarney native, was incredibly knowledgeable and funny. An insane, gruesome serial killer combined with the creepy, eerie atmosphere of Whitechapel led to an amazing, if shocking tour.

By the end of the tour, we were all exhausted. We returned to the hostel where I promptly collapsed into bed. And of course, we stayed up talking until the early hours of the morning. Eventually we fell asleep, excitedly anticipating the day ahead of us.

## **Sunday, 17<sup>th</sup> September (Ciara O'Connor)**

Bleary-eyed and exhausted from late night hats, I tumbled out of bed ready for the final day of what had proven to be an incredible trip. We woke up and went about the now regular morning ritual of showers, make-up, dressing and brushing teeth. A quick breakfast was followed by a room-check and impromptu selfie session with Ms. Buckley.

We all trudged down the stairs, dreading the end of this amazing trip, but also excited for another extraordinary excursion.

Our final destination in London was Exhibition Road, home of the Science Museum, the Natural History Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum. We were given the choice to visit our choice of museum.

Upon entering the Natural History Museum, the first thing I saw was the skeletal structure of a stegosaurus. However, that was not the most breath-taking part of even the entrance. As I craned my head to look up at the vaulted ceiling, I noticed the constellations on the walls and ceiling. My absolute favourite part of the museum had to be the escalator. I know that that may sound weird, but as you moved up the escalator you travelled through a model of the earth and got to pass through its core. On the upper levels there were many intriguing exhibits on volcanoes, earthquakes and tsunamis.

The Science Museum was naturally many people's favourite due to the flight simulator. Another major attraction of the Science Museum, was a machine which took a photo of you and then calculated your happiness level, age and gender based on past faces. Sometimes it was very accurate, deducing that Aoife was 18 and that Roksana was 16. But sometimes it got it very, very wrong, informing me that I must be seven (the true affirmation that I have a baby face!)

Finally, the Victoria and Albert Museum – home to the world's largest collection of decorative art and designs, had to be skipped as we only had so much time. However I heard from those who visited the V&A that it was absolutely gorgeous and I plan on going there next time I am in London.

Exhausted after an enjoyable week, we pulled into the London Luton airport. Many of us checked in on the All Ireland Minor Football Final – what would a Kerry school do without football?

Before take-off we had a chance for some last-minute duty-free shopping (the best kind) and to grab some food. The plane journey home was a lot more subdued than the excited bus trip there. On the bus back to Mounthawk all of us discussed our favourite moments and how unforgettable the trip had been. We returned to school the following day, but oh how I wished I could have stayed in London for another four days!