

Seat Sale

London, England

by Iain K. MacLEOD

THE AIR UP THERE

Travelling by air after the World Trade Center terrorist attacks is not as scary as you would think, when you find an airline that is still in business. The flight over and back had all the delays, increased security and scrutiny I was expecting, but not even one full body cavity search was administered. In a lot of ways, I was actually relieved to be leaving North America for two weeks. Of course, once I heard "President" Tony Blair blabbing on the BBC about a "new world order" and rampant rumours of airborne anthrax spores, I knew I would not be fully escaping America's New War.

The flight's entertainment consisted of a lethal cocktail of *Legally Blonde* and *Evolution*. I must admit that I paid five bucks for the circa 1970s orange headphones before I knew the scheduled mind-numbing entertainment. On the return, I sat through *A Knight's Tale* and *Shrek*, two great examples of how modern music and the middle ages can be brought together into one. THE PLANS

We were armed with our *Rough Guide to London* (www.roughguides.com) and Rick

Steve's *Guide to Great Britain* (www.ricksteves.com). Between the two, we'd laid out a pretty comprehensive and reliable framework for our journey. The former gives a purported "hip" overlook of the city, and the latter is a much more PG glimpse. Another essential piece of information is the latest copy of *Time Out London* (www.timeout.com), one of the more comprehensive travel guides. It helps to plan your precious time in the big city. Note to self: try to get the scoop on who's in town *before* arriving; that way you can contact a ticket agent and secure your Ryan Adams tickets *before* they are sold out. It appears that Europeans like to actually buy advance tickets, unlike the bulk of Maritimers.

ST. ALBAN'S

We stayed in a place called St. Alban's Home Base. It is a little north of London, only a ride on the Thameslink away. It is home to a park, a moderate sized cathedral, and a Wednesday market where you can get a pound of bananas, raw meat, and cover for your cell phone for under a fiver. The Waffle House is a definite



"I see London, I see France...no, that's just London."

must see/eat. Built in an old grist mill, the place serves sweet and savory waffles. Lots of local bars have references to cocks (The Cock, The Fighting Cocks, etc), but I am not sure it is significant.

I GET AROUND

Instead of four-way stops, they have roundabouts and most people drive little cars. One such car, the Smart Car, is so small it can fit sideways into a parking spot. Handy, but you can kiss your ass goodbye if you tangle with a large Mercedes truck on an M series highway. Someone should have told me they drive on the wrong side of the road out here!

Piccadilly Circus is neither a circus nor a good place to buy pickles.

It was easy to get around London with a one day travel pass. The underground can be a combat zone at rush hour, but during the day it is quite easy to maneuver around and make the necessary transfers to get across town with minimal tube rage. There is also adequate train and bus

(even double decker ones) connections to get you to Brighton (combination of Old Orchard beach and Rodeo Drive), Bath (where Fatboy Slim was married), Stonehenge (where I broke our camera), Liverpool (where the founder of Wings is from), and Blackpool (where there's a replica of Coronation Street). There are also many discount airlines that are cheaper than admission to a play in the West End. A ferry ride down the Thames proved to be one of the most humorous rides, with a guide that made lots of jokes about history and people's knickers. If you have the energy, there are many walking tours as well, dealing with ghosts, Jack the Ripper, rock 'n roll and Sherlock Holmes.

HISTORY: IT WILL COST YA

The neat thing about historic England, unlike here, is that instead of hearing, "a few hundred years ago, there were English and French settlements here," we would often hear, "a few thousand years ago, the Romans built large civilizations" or numerous stories of wars, plagues, fires and murders. Ah, the good ole days. We visited the Tower of London, which isn't so much a tower as it is a fort, where a



"Okay, you can chop off my head, but only if I get to chop off yours when you're finished."