



Experience Abroad Reflection
My home is in Scotland

Part I: London

I know a lot of people choose destinations they'd never been to before for their LiAs, however, given my Denmark visa rejection, I had to choose a destination I'd been to before so the visa would be easier to get (those with weak passports can probably relate). Thus, this was not my first time in London, it was actually my third! However, this summer was my first time *working* in London – I have many novel experiences to share!

What do I like about London and wish I had in Toronto/back home? The more efficient transit services! The tube comes much more frequently and the buses in central London are far more reliable than the TTC (at least in my experience). There is also a lot more connectivity to the outer skirts of London and regions outside of London. I made good use of this in my time there. Secondly, I absolutely adore London's reading culture. Not only is London the most mentioned European city in literature, I believe it has also been named as the best city for booklovers in the past! The bookstores are always crowded and you will spot readers of all ages on public transit. I've been in a reading slump for quite some time and coming to London always reignites my love for reading.



By the London Bridge (Left); a market at the Southbank Centre (Right)

More on work culture: this was my first 9-5 and first official work experience. Growing up, I consumed a lot of American media (both social and traditional). I was exposed to the horrible work-life balance Americans have and how they don't get sick days or are afraid not to come into work because "productivity" is all that matters. I recently saw a reel that sums up my perception of American work culture quite well: "Europeans treat pleasure as a part of life. Americans treat pleasure as a reward for working." Not only was I immersed in this hustle culture through the media, my high school also embodied this *toxic* American approach to work.

When I got coronavirus in my third week, I didn't know what to expect – how would my organization react? How would I react? How *should* I react? I was so surprised when my coworkers were incredibly understanding of my sickness and kept checking up on my health. Before asking me on a task update, they'd always ask about my recovery. I did not feel like my sickness was a burden or obstacle to the organization because I couldn't complete my tasks on time – I was assured I could take my time to fully recover. This was so eye-opening – different countries have such different work environments and this week made me realize that this is a factor I should prioritize when deciding where I want to work. This is a very simple realization. Not everyone wants their work to become their life and it was nice to be reminded of optionality in this decision. I'm sure I haven't even experienced the other extreme yet - France and other European countries are even more "life-oriented" and have better workers' rights.

Another observation I made was regarding the impact of political controversy and volatility. My organization has clientele all over the world – particularly in the UK and Canada. When working with some clients, they'd hear phrases like "We're so glad you're not American." There have also been internal conversations on moving to non-American service providers for better data protection. It's interesting to see how politics has the ability to seep into every single decision made by every single company – it does not matter how non-political your company claims to be – ultimately, everything is political. This became exceptionally clear to me when I discussed a particular article from *The Telegraph* with my coworkers. I can't seem to recall the name of the article and wasn't able to find it but essentially, an advertisement showcasing progressive values was being criticised for promoting a left-wing agenda. In this article, a specific progressive company was called out for contributing to this advertisement. Many employees of this company were harassed and received threatening messages from right-wingers who'd come across the article. Their safety was at risk. People who work politics in increasingly polarizing societies are so brave, and their work is truly so valuable.

Not limited to work: I've realized I really like the water! I see myself living in a coastal city or generally a city with access to a large water body. I love being able to take ferries across the city to get from one place to another. Think New York, Toronto, and obviously London! Shoutout to the uber boats. Visiting different places with different norms and expectations is so useful in determining what you like and what you don't like.

Part II: Scotland (Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh & The Highlands!)

Scotland has been on my bucket list for AGES. I briefly visited Glasgow and Edinburgh in 2023, during my first trip to the UK – it was quite rushed and we didn't get to explore the Highlands. This time around, I made sure to tick that off the bucket list by taking advantage of the flexibility of remote work. Scotland was absolutely mesmerizing.



By the Ness Islands in Inverness

Before I go into the details of my Scotland trip, I want to provide some context to how I'd been feeling about travel right before the trip. When I first came to London, every building and the corner of every street had me in awe. The architecture was insanely intricate and the layout of the city was very unlike where I'd grown up. The third time around though... everything looked normal. The extraordinary had become the ordinary (shoutout to Alsu for articulating this sentiment). This really started to bother me because I felt the same way

when I visited New York earlier in the summer. Did I lose the thrill of travel? Why don't I get as excited as I used to when I was kid? I'm not ungrateful and I deeply appreciate the opportunity to travel around the world so this feeling of unfulfillment or normalcy from visiting new places really really started to bother me. Scotland reignited my love for travel. It was extraordinary.

The art is what I loved the most! Scottish art galleries have come to be my most favorite in the world. The interactive exhibitions were the best part. You know how you're not allowed to touch objects in museums & galleries? There was a small exhibition at the Aberdeen Art Gallery inviting visitors to touch and feel objects. And a small drawing studio to draw still life art with props you could move around! This was also the first gallery where I saw digital art displayed – maybe I just don't go to that many art galleries but this was so cool to see. In the Scottish Highlands, you find Celtic and spiritual art often displayed in the form of a tapestry – a beautiful and well-curated gateway into the life of the Highlanders. There were so many misconceptions I had about Scotland and so many things I didn't know; these exhibitions served as the most immersive and enjoyable history lessons as well as being visually admirable.



Exhibition at the Inverness Castle (Left); the National Gallery in Edinburgh (Right)

Part III: “The best souvenir travel gives you is perspective.”

(^Also quoting a reel here – I’m a very chronically online individual if you couldn’t already tell)

I have truly learnt so much from my international experiences, both professionally and personally. Growing up in one place, you subconsciously subscribe to certain norms that you come to believe to be the right and only way to do things. Travel shatters that point of view, and gives you the ability to think in more nuanced and sophisticated ways. My summer has definitely strengthened my desire to travel more of the world. I look forward to more international research experiences!

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