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Monarch Traveler: Finding Roots

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Monarch Traveler: Finding Roots

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Monarch Traveler

Finding Roots

伦敦
高门
城市岛
卡姆登
拉科克
Editor's Letter

An overseas voyage with a singular purpose, my long-awaited return to London came with 13 angels. Cherubs, students, novice travelers, floated and followed over a dark ocean. Love and curiosity sustained them, their souls glittered in each cobblestone click and powdered tea time. I became their guide, their mentor in many ways, but not of geography or knowledge, but of the self. To find oneself through travel, to dine alone, sing street fashion, and dazzle a solitary dawn, in them a world inside a world bloomed. The experience transcended time, mirroring my past life in their future, once passenger, now captain docked at the shoreline, awaiting the next adventure.

- Professor Alicia DeFonzo
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unearthing immortality

Searching for answers in an unlikely place.
I’ve always held a certain fascination with cemeteries.

Perhaps it is pure morbid curiosity, or perhaps something deeper. Regardless, wandering the dirt paths of Highgate Cemetery brought with it an irreplaceable experience of peace and introspection. Much of the cemetery has fallen into disrepair, and it is curious to look between the well-maintained areas and those that have been reclaimed by nature. Headstones from as early as the nineteenth century sit in crooked rows, sprawling into a green, gray, and ashy white tangle of trees, stone, and vegetation. Many headstones have become illegible over the decades, their names faded along with history. Some are broken, some cracked, some knocked askew by gnarled tree roots, others overtaken entirely. Worn down figures of heavenly bodies weep trails of black and green algae. Mausoleum doors stand overtaken with vines and cobwebs, their handles and hinges speckled with rust. It is eerily quiet, lonely almost, and yet not foreboding. There is no threat here, only the call of birds, the rustle of small animals, and the crunching footsteps and hushed whispers of the occasional visitor.
I often think of death when visiting these places, as many do. It is something that comes for us all, no matter how much we try to fight it, run from it, hide from it. In every culture, we try to explain it in different ways, try to define an afterlife, try to give ourselves something to look forward to, or even something to fear. We search for our purpose in death and amongst the dead. It is why we flock to exhibits of mummies, of burial places and grand monuments, why a charity organization, called The Friends of Highgate Cemetery, stepped in in the 1970s to resurrect a ruined old cemetery and breathe new life into its grounds. With our fascination with death, we also hold a deep lust for immortality. We cannot let places such as this cemetery, places like the Great Pyramids of Giza, the Paris catacombs, the Taj Mahal, fall to ruin. We aim to save not only the beauty of their structure, but the immortal souls of those held within and those who placed them there. It brings about a question, too, however, about those graves that lie within the closed off and abandoned places, hidden amongst untamed wilderness, about those people whose names have been erased and who have been forgotten, even of those who never made it to places such as this, whose bodies were lost or burned or dumped and swallowed back up by the earth. What is their fate? Does immortality require a plaque upon a mausoleum or a pyramid erected by thousands of
I wonder this as I stop to admire the glistening monument of Karl Marx, placed ahead of dozens of crooked headstones of unknown others. People stop to snap photos, to read his plaques and great accomplishments. I wonder this, too, as I search amongst the thousands of names for the more famous ones; Eliot, Greene, Rossetti, Tennyson, and more. I wonder this as I read the starred sites on the map, markers for the most popular and most accomplished. But what about the thousands of others; who searches for them? I think of my own family, whose graves I never visit. They’re scattered around the country, in towns and cities my family has long since moved away from, places I have never been or don’t care to return to. Will they one day be forgotten? Will I?

The last grave I visit belongs to Douglas Adams, a famous author. It is small, only about a foot and a half or so in height, boasting a mere three words engraved in simple font: “Douglas Adams, Writer.” It is in such an overgrown and crowded spot it can almost be missed, dwarfed by older and more elaborate graves of people I’ve never heard of. Before it, however, dozens of visitors have stuck pens into the earth. They are of all different shapes, sizes, and colors, all haphazardly poking out at a hundred different angles. I dig in my own bag for a pen, and climb up the uneven hillside to present it to Mr Adams. It is a ballpoint Bic, capless, and I am unsure if there is even any ink left, but I don’t think he will mind. I crouch down, careful not to disturb his other tokens, and shove the tip into the dirt. It is harder than I imagined. I nearly lose my balance when I stand, grinning and satisfied, albeit a bit embarrassed, to turn to face a cluster of other visitors watching from below.
As I leave the cemetery, I feel almost giddy. Even after spending hours inspecting mausoleums, snapping shots of unique and beautiful graves, taking in sweet words and names, so very many names, my thoughts linger on the simple black headstone of Douglas Adams, of his hundreds of pens and all the people from different parts of the world who have come before me to leave their tokens, of all who have yet to come. I think of how he has, perhaps unintentionally, found immortality, not in a grand memorial, but in what he gave the world before his departure. I think of the graves of my loved ones that I have never visited, and feel less guilty, for I have not kept them alive with trinkets and bouquets of flowers, but with the memories I hold closest to my heart. I keep them alive by cooking their holiday recipes, by reciting their words of advice, by recounting our experiences. I paint portraits of them with my thoughts and words and carry them with me wherever I go. Perhaps I will never understand the true meanings of life and death and immortality or what comes next, but I feel comforted in knowing that I can someday leave something beautiful behind with what I make of today.

**JORDAN ZOLL**

For more information about The Friends of Highgate Cemetery, visit highgatecemetery.org

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The War Rooms

Zoe Powell

Winston Churchill was just a man trying to do his best when Britain faced the Axis Powers. As Prime Minister of the United Kingdom during World War II, his work with the United States, while also being an aggressive match to Adolf Hitler, has marked him as one of the most famous Prime Ministers of all time. Outside of leading his country, he served in the military along with being First Lord of the Admiralty and a slew of other titles. Having switched his political party multiple times he often talked of ratting.

Winston Churchill's life of fame also comes with the horror of many wars. Nevertheless, the curators did a wonderful job of making the museum kid-friendly. With interactive elements throughout the space, you and your family could spend all day there due to the wide-reaching amount of information within the Imperial Museum. Some of the interactive items they had included a quote tablet and a flippable dress-up for Winston Churchill throughout his life.

In addition to these interactive elements, watching his funeral video leaves the room hauntingly dark and makes the viewer encompassed in the moment. Some highlights of the museum would be the comics of Churchill and Hitler, a look through his political life before becoming prime minister, and his awards. Looking at famous people as what is shown in books, movies, or television shows, does not show the whole picture. Throughout the war rooms, you can see the difference in how higher-positioned and lower officials lived at the time.

There is a slight break where their breathtaking rental venue and little café can be found. Inside, you can find a wide selection of sandwiches, caffeinated beverages, and desserts. One of the suggested desserts is Winston’s Fruit Cake, originally made by his chef Georgina Landemare. Churchill's War Rooms are important to the world because Churchill’s bravery and determination set a precedent everywhere. His story and name will live on forever because of his impact as a flawed individual who managed to save his country and help end one of the biggest wars in history.
Internal Findings Through Black Art

A traveling artist is met with self-discovery in London while searching for representation of black culture within art.

By Bria Tyler
Anxious thoughts and abstractly painted images occupy my mind daily. While only studying art for two years in Norfolk, Virginia, I face several internal challenges regarding the topic of confidence as a black artist. Occasionally, I am met with having creative blocks, comparing myself to other artists, and questioning whether my artwork is good enough. Despite my mental anguish, I enjoy visiting art museums and speaking with other artists about their works. As I prepared to travel to London, finding representation within art and talking with black artists, such as myself, was necessary when arriving.

Many black artists and artists of color face challenges with their visual art practices. Some of these challenges concern acceptance into exhibition spaces, exposure to high-quality art equipment, limitations to studio access, etc. As mentioned in an interview with the visual and creative magazine, *Format*, African photographer Zanele Muholi discusses how many black artists long to be respected and recognized. Due to these obstacles embedded in oppression, many art lovers worldwide have not discovered numerous incredibly talented black artists.

After taking the first day in London to learn how to navigate public transportation, I made it a mission on the second day to find black artists in London, view their work, and speak with them. London Lighthouse Gallery and Studio was the first black-owned gallery I could find to venture off to. After searching through their Instagram page and becoming amazed by the artwork showcased, I set off to find this establishment on my own. "The second day in a new city, across the world, on a different continent, and she thinks she can use public transportation and find this place alone? Okay, good luck!" said the negative voice in my head.

Upon looking at my map... excuse me, entering the location into my GPS, I learned this gallery was in City Island. After getting lost in the station, riding four tubes, anxiously viewing a low battery, and rerouting iPhone 14, 2 hours later, I finally only made it off the tube. Negative thoughts appeared absent during this time, and an unfamiliar and positive voice coached me to meet my goal. "I can do it. I will find this gallery," I repeatedly chanted to myself. A lift inside the tube station helped to guide me in the right direction. As the doors opened, a long walk began across a high bridge with red safety railings bordering it, and just below lies rippling, murky water from the Rea River. Overseeing the bridge is the view of the entire city. Once exiting the bridge, utter quietness met with me. The only subtle noises appeared from footsteps encountering the cobblestone roadway and small chatter from collages outside a compact café. A few steps straight onto the road lies London Lighthouse Gallery and Studio. I finally made it to my destination.
Filled with satisfaction, I rushed to open the tall glass doors to enter the gallery space. Shop owner and photographer Sokari R. Higgwe immediately greeted me. After explaining to Sokari my mission to find black artists in London and learning more about them, he became interested and began guiding me on a tour of the gallery space. The displayed exhibition is an arrangement of artists from a variety of nationalities and ethnicities. Various works are mounted on large, white dividers in the middle of the space, similar to standing domino pieces, allowing for easy navigation through the exhibition. While examining the works closely, I could smell the mediums used in the artwork, such as subtle fuming scents of ballpoint pen and oil paint, to name a few. As SoKari took me through the exhibition, he prioritized highlighting the black artists participating in this show. He explained that many black artists in his studio are contemporary Nigerian artists residing in Nigeria. "Nigerian?" I thought to myself. I understand I am in a different area of the world. However, it never dawned on me that there was a possibility I would see artists of color who were from somewhere other than London.

As the tour continued, I mustered up the courage to ask Sokari if he had any black British artists on display. Although one of his artists was born in London, he was raised in Nigerian culture and lived in Nigeria. Quite interesting to learn that the shop owner, Sokari, is also a Nigerian artist. Due to his fame in the States, the well-known painter Kehinde Wiley was my only recognition of art from a Nigeria artist. At this very moment, I realized that as an African American artist, I, had my own bias toward black art. Feelings of disbelief overcame me at this newfound acknowledgment.

At the end of the tour, I asked SoKari how he gained the confidence to open an art gallery and studio and showcase and sell his photography prints. "I sometimes still have confidence issues, but I have learned that not everybody will like your work. Art is subjective. And if you get just a small amount of positive feedback, then you have an audience that likes your work," he answered.
After purchasing a few art pieces, I left Lighthouse with peace. Riding on the tube back into town, I reflected on the conversation with Sokari. I realized he took a leap of faith to open his gallery, continue his practice as an artist, and showcase it to others, not because he had artistic confidence but because he had confidence in himself. Believing confidence could be received within myself through advice from others was an illusion, and more so a practice that is learned from failure, from success, and from realizing biases and mistakes and learning from them. I was searching for something I already had within myself. It takes courage and confidence to fail at directions but stay persistent to find the destination. It takes courage and confidence to speak to artists about their challenges while also being vulnerable to share some of your own. It takes courage and confidence to recognize your biases and grow from them. After a while, the self-doubt showed up less and less during the trip. Although it sometimes still appears, and despite any internal and external challenges I naturally face, traveling to London showed me I can be a confident and successful artist.
In the northeast neighborhood of Shoreditch, London, lies a unique mashup of bar, museum, and collection of oddities named The Viktor Wynd Museum of Curiosities. The museum is home to the Last Tuesday Society, founded at Harvard in 1873 and later brought to London by Viktor Wynd and David Piper. According to their website, the organization “seeks to create a new world filled with beauty, wonder and the imagination with a bewildering array of events and exhibitions all over the country, from recreations of Victorian Seances, replete with ectoplasm in a Cornish Quarry, to Literary Dinners & Salons at The Cafe Royal. The eccentricity of its founder is showcased within, where visitors are greeted by an absinthe bar, and, below, the famous museum. There is a wide variety of cocktails offered in the candlelit bar area, where visitors are watched over by the preserved heads of deer, crocodile skeletons, miscellaneous taxidermy creatures, and a plethora of other eerie decor made from organic and inorganic materials. The cocktails are an artsy blend of absinthe and other spirits, mixed into highballs, spritzers, and frozen concoctions. The more daring patron can even indulge in pure absinthe served the traditional way, where the bartender presents a goblet of the eerily green liquid and a fountain of cold spring water that drips delicately over a sugar cube perched on a silver spoon. As the water, sugar, and absinthe mix, the contents of the glass turn cloudy and the flavors of anise, fennel, and wormwood are released.

After properly indulging at the bar, visitors can climb down a narrow spiral staircase made of painted wrought iron into the treasure trove below. The museum is comprised of four low lit rooms featuring anything and everything from a gold plated hippopotamus skeleton once owned by cartel leader Pablo Escobar, to a jar of moles suspended in liquid, to books with quirky titles like, The English: Are They Human? This place is not for the faint of heart, as it holds not only amusing, but often macabre and even offensive items. There is artwork featuring death, satanic symbolism, witchcraft, nude bodies, and sexual acts. Skeletons of all shapes and sizes sit amongst pornographic books, shrunken skulls, and endless taxidermy. The taxidermy seems to be the most popular with the collector, with preserved carcasses as small as fruit flies and as large as a lion seated at a dinner table. Visitors whisper and giggle at the many displays, and little note cards with handwritten anecdotes from the founder sit next to his enormous collection of oddities. It is clearly a place curated with passion, if not a slight bit of insanity. Regardless, it offers an escape from the often monotonous real world and into the mystical mind of one Viktor Wynd, a figure as unique as his name.

Discover more about the Last Tuesday Society and Viktor Wynd’s Museum of Curiosities at thelasttuesdaysociety.org
Walking Through the Wildflowers

Embracing the freedom of letting go, and slowing down.

by Keegan Riggs
Strong vines and delicate leaves manipulated into curved archways with lavender wisteria descend above my head, honoring the late princess, Diana. Manicured lawns with carefully placed flower beds align perfectly with one another. Purple, the color of royalty and regality, is in full bloom in every direction. Tea Roses and Moonwort open their faces towards the sun. Cobble walkways clack with strollers, elderly couples hand in hand, uniformed students, and groups of tourists, all spending the afternoon appreciating the art of the gardens. Lofty sculptures of Queen Victoria and renowned British heroes look down on me as I take it all in. Dark green hedges and bushes are shaped into perfect circles, cones, and squares. There is not a single leaf out of place, nor weed to be found. Iron gates, painted black, seem to be keeping something out.

Landing in London for the first time, I was ecstatic to see the renowned gardens that seemed to be around every corner. The lovely Kensington palace gardens were my first taste of the magic of the green spaces that seem woven into daily life in London. The gardens were far more elaborate and celebrated than anything that I have noticed in the States. Sure, we have our botanical gardens, but those are an occasional visit sort of place, not something weaved into daily life, but even those seem puny compared to what I was witnessing in London. Our parks at home are plain grass and metal playground structures that push melancholy inside of you. Our cracked asphalt walking paths are crowded with those on a health kick, marathon training, especially in the early Spring. Leisurely strolling during lunch hour in a garden to admire the beauty of blooms, is not a part of our culture.

I was not at all disappointed by the two worlds I stumbled into...
The gardens of London fascinated me, I was drawn to them in a way that was deeper than beauty, there was an unexplainable passing of time, minutes were mere seconds. There was a history I was beginning to unlock. It has been said that in the early 18th century in Britain, there was a break in tradition when it came to gardening. There was an opposition of opinions on how the gardens and green spaces should be arranged, and more than that, what they were to be used for. Like the Palace Gardens I saw at Kensington, the well-manicured and geometric style gardens were gems of the country, people’s personal gardens aimed to be this way as well. Craving something different, there was a pull for something more organic, freer. The art of a wild garden became appreciated, and they started appearing where shaved hedges and rows of identical flowers once lived.

itchy type, but unruly and damp and could easily reach my calves, the kind of grass that yields to your body when you lay down in it. There are no marked pathways to guide you but instead well-worn areas that hold memories of footsteps. Wildflowers spring up every which way, false forget-me-nots glitter blue in the afternoon sun. As soon as I enter this side of the gardens, I immediately felt the need to feel the earth beneath my feet, and it did not feel weird to give into this need in a public space. My soul felt restored, my body needed a rest.

Like Kensington gardens, I found myself experiencing the juxtaposing gardens again on a visit to Regent’s Park. Initially planning this trip to see the famous Queen Mary’s Rose Gardens, I was not at all disappointed by the two worlds that I stumbled into. The rose gardens in the center of the park had beautiful circular garden beds full of all the roses you could dream of, in every color and size. There were large stone fountains with cherubs and flowing waters, and gold details on the gates and entrances, it was all very exquisite. Benches were strategically placed the same distance apart from one another, with identical bushes on either side. Plaques were delicately placed identifying each of the 85 different types of roses, and having over 12,000 roses over all. The grass could have been measured by the millimeter, it was that precise.
Journeying out of the center of the gardens, I find myself in the wild again. Daisies are endless in my sight, the symbol of childhood innocence, instep with the sound of children laughing and yelling with playmates that they likely made that day. Trees bend and twist to make canopy hideouts for these laughing children to run through, a fairy garden, a far cry from the metal playgrounds back home. Old tree stumps are stepping stones, the fluffy cows-parsley creating an ocean that was meant to be frolicked through. People were different here. The sunlight on their bare faces brought the human in them out of hiding, people threw back their heads when a joke was told, eyes shimmered on romantic picnic dates, families playing games together and melting into one another. Even bird songs were louder here. It was a happy haze. There was no second guessing who was meant to be here, it was for everyone. Communal took on a whole new meaning.

Back home, I ponder the state our society sits in, especially the American “grind” culture. Relaxation and playfulness are losing sight of the goal, and therefore makes you lazy. We say that people who work hard are the ones who are working hours of overtime and do not have time for anything else, and that is seen as a respectable thing. The grind is normalized. The pressure to be ‘on’ all the time is a burden placed on many people. I see that pressure in the royal gardens, the need to put on a show, to dazzle and amaze, which I admit, was quite a joy to experience but did not feed the child within me. What I found in the wild gardens was a hand holding that burden for me, even if it was just for an hour or two. Perhaps that is why the green spaces are places to throw your head back, walk a little slower, stop and admire a spring bloom. From now on, without a doubt, I will choose the wild every time.

Keegan Riggs
The national gallery has put on display an immersive art exhibition that leaves the viewers with a rollercoaster of emotions. Her elegant yet dark display of nine different everchanging projects perfectly applies pressure to European art history and is a must-see for anyone traveling to London this summer. This free exhibit by Nalini Malani challenges the history of European arts and shares the voices of oppressed cultures, especially women. Visitors can access this exhibit by using the main entrance and heading up the stairs, where they will see the dark room labeled "My reality is different." Once you find where this exhibit is located, you won't be able to miss it. You will be consumed by red and black visuals and teleported to a poetic storyteller. The artist uses well-known pieces of art from the National Gallery and the Holburne Museum in Bath to make dynamic drawings that move around the big, empty, dark room.

What makes this exhibit especially impressive is that all these drawings were made on an iPad to divulge different aspects of early artworks; the mixed sensory of sound and visuals makes this immersive exhibition rarely unforgettable. During your entire time in this exhibit room, you will feel as if you are drowning in forgotten history, consumed by empathetic agony. This is a temporary art exhibition that went on display for the first time in the Holburne Museum and can be accessed until June 2023. Malanis' collection of cumulative art has earned her the first artist to receive the National Gallery's Contemporary Fellowship making this immersive exhibition exceptionally powerful as she is a woman in art challenging patriarchs in the arts.

"Poetic potency"

By: Skylar Gough

But what truly captivates the viewers to this immersive experience so blisteringly powerful is the voice-over used to narrate the forgotten history of women and other oppressed communities. The voice heard over the animation is Cassandra, an ancient Greek myth who was victimized by her own sexuality. Because of how women are treated very similarly today Using her voice to destroy and transform the narrative of these famous paintings is liberating to forgotten history. This is exactly what Malanis purpose was when creating this animated art exhibit as she states, “These paintings are not sacrosanct, they need to be looked at in a different way.” She uses this ideology to monumentally re-present details from the 25 different works that can be seen in her video installment. She not only challenges forgotten women’s history but also challenges African and Indian history when she uses fictional portraits and figures to reveal the long and painful cultural history. The poetic potency that fills this room can be felt long after you leave this immersive chamber and truly makes one consider the world we have built.
Woven Wonder Woman

The works of fibers artist and sculptor Magdalena Abakanowicz test art traditions as we know them.

Polish fibers artist and sculptor Magdalena Abakanowicz is known for her immense installations of fiber sculptures and installations. Her work helps to depict a reflection of her life living in Poland during the Polish-Soviet War while also focusing on texture within her nature and fiber sculptures. Many of her works tell stories about humanity, war, and nature.

First entering the exhibition, one is greeted in a bright room by large rug-like creations by Abakanowicz parallel to each other on separate walls. Traveling into the next space, the mood shifts from light and inviting to hesitant and questionable. Within this room, the lights are dim, and the walls are black. Museum guests will immediately be met face-to-face with three of Magdalena Abakanowicz’s fiber sculptures installed from the ceiling and dangling down in a row in the middle of the room. Many describe these sculptures as appearing like large clusters of shaved yak fur. As one continues through the exhibition, a video of Abakanowicz explaining her artwork and studio practices plays when approaching the next bright room, filled with this artist’s colorful installations.

Magdalena Abakanowicz coined the term ‘Abakan”, derived from her last name, to describe her abstract fiber sculptures. One of her most famous pieces, titled Abakan Red, is on display closer to the end of the exhibition. It is neighbored by sculptures of different heights, sizes, shapes, and colors, along with a few of Abakanowicz’s sketch drawings. Abakan Red, along with the other Abakans, questions the viewers on bodily areas, mainly women’s vaginal region, while also questioning life and nature as a whole.

Towards the end of her years, master artist Magdalena Abakanowicz began to steer away from fiber works and lean more towards the side of nature installations. Before exiting the exhibition space, guests will venture through images of Abakanowicz’s nature sculptures, along with quotes and descriptions by the artists. Anasta, a tree trunk with steel coverings strapped to the ends of this massive trunk, completes the exhibit before leaving one in awe.

AS TOLD BY BRIA TYLER
Queer, alternative, and lost in a foreign country... Having never been anywhere outside of the eastern seaboard, I experienced a culture shock visiting London. I over-prepared by packing formal clothing to fit in with the fashion they were said to have. This of course was not my own style, but I tried my best to make it my own. However, on arrival at Heathrow Airport, I found myself looking at a collage of colors and styles. This continued to shine through even as I left the airport.

My whole life, I have felt like a social outcast; may that be for my height, weight, interests, or clothing. Coming from a very conservative area, where the houses and people look alike, gave me anxiety about being different. My group of friends has always been a small group with a similar style or ideology. My group was ostracized for the simplest of things: colored hair, attraction to the same gender, choice of makeup, and a lack of colored clothing.

**Alternative Look at London**

London’s alternative clothing styles and it's impact on the people who visit.
I have been known to switch up my clothing style almost every day, may that be wearing a camouflage shirt and a big buckled belt one day, or an all-black laced dress with a corseted addition the next, I pick an outfit that day based on how I’m feeling. Most of the time I appear alternatively because I dye my hair frequently, love thick eyeliner, and wear mostly black. Words like emo, goth, and funnily enough, emu have been used to describe me. My love for the alternative lifestyle could be attributed to my gothic mother, who only wears black clothing. At a young age, probably in infancy, I was introduced to heavy metal, a genre of music most customary to people of alternative origin. At the age of seven, I began dying my hair, and by age ten I had started wearing makeup to school. Throughout middle school, I wore unconventional dresses, mostly from my favorite store, Hot Topic.

Throughout my years outside of heavy metal concerts, the only consistent alternative person I had to look up to was my mother. Most people I saw day to day never looked like us, or they even gave us disapproving stares. I understand how to change my appearance to a more conventionally attractive state, but I would be changing for others and not for myself.

In London, I was met with crowds of people of similar fashion. Walking through Heathrow Airport, I was met with a poster of a man with face tattoos and piercings. It was beautiful and nothing like what you’d see in the southern United States of America. With it being customs where we saw this poster, we could not take pictures, but every bone in my body wanted to appreciate the difference I saw. He was there as an official poster for Heathrow, not just an alternative store, he was looked at as a sense of normal. The rest of my time in London followed suit.

By far the most welcomingly alternative place is Camden Town, just north of the British Library and King’s Cross Train Station. Streets lined with street market shops, brightly colored clothing, and unconventional fashion. Every block another tattoo and piercing parlor, leather boot shops galore, and vintage clothing stores. Following the street upwards you’ll find a dazzling, multi-colored crosswalk, as it’s toward the end of the shopping area it feels like a calling to pull you to the other side of the street. Seeing this place is like seeing a melting pot of different cultures and styles; you’ll find people from all walks of life.
I spoke with an alternative person (pictured) on the streets of Camden. I asked about how she feels comfortable dressing as she does. She responded with how open and freeing it is to dress as she wants. Originating from France, she says she is completely comfortable in Camden. Speaking to a man with a mullet and denim clothes, who worked at the local vintage store, Rockit, I told him the diversity and differences seen in the United States, explaining that certain states have a reputation, but most of the time you are fine in a city.

This type of fashion can even be seen in the fashion exhibit at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The two lines show the different fashion styles that can be seen on the streets of London. The titles of these are “London Contemporary Menswear 2012-2015” and “Radical Fashion 1990-”. Both show brightly colored clothing, with exciting designs and at minimum a touch of uniqueness.

On Old Compton Street many gay clubs can be found, a group of us went to two of them, and no matter the sexuality they were welcoming. It was nice to feel a sense of comfort with my sexuality and the people inside dressed in many different fashions, but were proud to be themselves, as am I.
As I walked through London I found many others who looked like me or what I aspired to dress like. Piercings, tattoos, dyed hair, bold makeup, and dark clothing... the epitome of fashion in my eyes. The loose expression each person was able to have with their outfits, some even looked as though they were going to work whilst dressing alternatively. I, on the other hand, have to flip up my septum piercing and take out my nose piercing every time I have a job interview.

My career path does not help as most people in my field are conservative men, who do not like change or diversity. I am within the field of Mechanical Engineering, and whilst in London I met a fellow mechanical engineer, Jay. Jay congratulated me on being a woman in STEM and said I should do wonderful things since there aren’t many women even in the United Kingdom. He said that people will be likely to hire me because I am a woman, unlike in the United States.

The United States has a way of seeing how low the population of women in engineering is and continuing to push them out. As President of my university’s Society of Women Engineers, I’ve seen noticeable discrimination in and out of the field. As both of my parents are also engineers, they have also seen the discrepancies. This can be attributed to the fashion industry as well, the United States, doesn’t like the breaking out of its box even for a second.

All of this shows how London is a more open, diverse, and alternative area than found in United States cities. It’s exciting to see other countries be more open than the United States, especially since the United States likes to act as though they are the best first-world country. This opening of my eyes has allowed me to feel more comfortable, even back in the United States.
I can't abandon the person I once was, so I carry her with me. Everywhere I have been since birth I have been carrying this version of myself. A version of myself that feels stuck in the wrong place and time. A version of myself that is comprised with constellations of lifetimes. This day is simply a blip in time that leaves my soul craving for my truest identity. Before my travels to the village of Lacock, England this feeling never seemed to escape me. I had learned to find solidity in my deep emptiness until I had the cathartic experience of uncovering my past life in this gothic, yet welcoming neighborhood where the streets may seem dark, or maybe even gloomy.

I understand that the idea of a past life can be absurd to prudent minds. The theory can simply not be proven or disproven; leaving this idea open for interpretation and polarizing opinions. The only evidence of this philosophy can be seen when young children reminisce on life experiences different from their own. The famed stories of James Leinger recalling memories of being a World War II pilot, or Ryan Hammons remembering being a Hollywood extra in a lifetime outside of his own come to mind. These two experiences show that there is a possibility of another life in a separate existence. Services from Pseudoscientists and hypnotherapist might be the only way to access your alternate lifetime. Whether this ideology of a past life is real or fantasy, reconnecting with your older soul can reveal personality traits that help determine why we do the things we do and can serve as a navigation tool to the contemporary society that is present life.
Modern life can feel shapeless. Our continual advancements in the field of technology and social media have created a barrier between us. Most of my life has felt as though I’ve been watching from the outside. The picture has been blurry and lacks a real connection with myself. This feeling of being out of sync with the century and generation is an isolating experience. Most people feel more connected with each other through social media, leaving me at a loss for interpersonal connections. Perhaps, this is where my regression started because my phone did not work once, I landed in London. Given we are all used to having this technological handheld world I was incredibly nervous about not having access to my phone services. However, by the second day I felt the escape I had always craved; living freely and not tied down to the technological prison of the modern world. I felt my revolution begin the minute I landed in London.

Time and space cease to exist when I am exploring the dimensions of my past. From the moment I first stepped foot off the bus and onto the medieval streets of Lacock, there was a sickening feeling of familiarity. It reminded me of a time I visited a hypnotherapist during a spiritual retreat in the North Carolina Forest and experienced a past life regression. While under hypnosis, I saw a recollection of memories spent in a quiet town in the English countryside that heavily mirrored the town of Lacock. Whether these were images of a real-life experience or a fabrication of my hypnosis, they gave me a nostalgic feeling of home. This feeling could only be matched by my famous pub lunch of fish and chips at the Red Lion in the heart of Lacock.
After a much too short visit to this historic town, I had a two-hour bus ride to reflect on the recollection that I had just experienced. I remember thinking while on the bus traveling back to the city, “I knew who I was when I left the hotel this morning,” and how much I have changed since then. I remembered the feeling of my heart skipping and beating faster as I walked the streets that were all too familiar to my feet. I've realized something at this moment on the bus. I've realized just how little I've truly lived in my present body. I have either been stuck in a state of mental bardo or plunged into the technological world. Either way, I've forgotten to live in the present. The visit to Lacock showed me how to live in the past, present, and future. How to live in a connection of parallel experiences.

I could not have envisioned a better town to visit during my travels to London. If I had not taken this trip to Lacock, I would still be stuck in a state of limbo, constantly longing for something I cannot achieve. My breathing has been much better since revealing my past. I have admired more. I have cut out the excessive use of technology. I have been present in every way that matters. Lacock changed the way I view my current life, reconnecting me with my mind, body, and soul. I have learned something that cannot be taught; I have learned to no longer spread my identity across the timeline and to live every day in the present.
Intricate carvings of flowers, cherubs, and other natural designs cover the dark wooden archways and doorways throughout the hotel. The elegant and historical Grand Royale London Hyde Park is steps away from Kensington Gardens and Palace, in the Westminster borough of central London. Take a jump back in time to the early 20th century upon entering into the stunning hotel lobby and witness the beauty that is Edwardian style. Built for King Edward VII’s mistress, American Actress Lillie Langtry, romantic interiors and design envelope every common space of the Grand Royale. Tall windows bring lots of natural light into the darker interior, and round and soft edges on furniture give the room a comforting feel. Big bouquets of rich purple orchids in silver bowls sit in the lobby and parlor, welcoming guests into the space. Lifesize portraits hang on the walls of the parlor, including one of Queen Victoria, Edward’s mother.
Ascending the stairs to the next floor, the stairway is a masterpiece itself. The high ceilings are painted with renaissance-style imagery, with gold trim. The tall bow windows are stained with regal pictures of crowns and family shields. A small, rounded balcony, reminiscent of Shakespeare’s Juliet, looks over the foyer. Hours can be spent wandering the halls of the hotel finding little details that had to be meant for the King’s love. One flight up from the lobby is the hotel’s restaurant. Serving breakfast every morning, guests can get a full English breakfast in all its glory, baked beans on toast, roasted tomatoes, sausage, eggs, and assorted pastries with black currant jam to top it off. White marble fireplaces, and cream walls create an airy and calm environment to take in the views of London out of the tall windows. One could sit here forever.

Originally built as a private residence for Langtry, the Grand Royale was bought several years later and renovated by two contemporary artists who kept the Edwardian charm but made several unique additions, one in particular to honor the American star, a stunning theatre bar on the ground floor. Guests can order ‘tipples and nibbles’, alcoholic drinks and light snacks, while enjoying the lush atmosphere. Oversized burgundy velvet theatre seats are scattered in groupings of two to four, and matching coaches and stools are placed around the edges of the room. Gold designs climb up the white wall and full wall mirrors are placed on each side of the room, making the room look endless, though it is actually quite small and cozy. Sold again to be made into the hotel, the charm of the theatre bar is unchanged. It is the perfect place to unwind and chat about your findings after a day of exploring London.