

Hi Everyone,

Seeing everyone's recap Tiktoks and Instagram posts was inspiration enough to write another edition. A lot happened in 2022, and that itself is blessing enough after 2021. Yet to make a recap of my own, what I can offer is a video of my time in Manchester:

<https://youtu.be/AyQd6bObXDU> Reflecting on how I may have changed this year, I realise a lot only happened after work started. Nonetheless,

- Cynicism: Driven by several specific occurrences as well as my general outlook post uni, I think I have developed a healthy scepticism of other entities. This ties in to an increased drive to be self-sufficient, and be selfish towards my own happiness. Although there are some downsides to this approach including reduced collaboration, I am more at peace with it for now.
- Communication: Staying in touch on short-form text, such as Whatsapp feels increasingly unfeasible. It is good for planning logistics or for one-off requests, but I have found it difficult to sustain longer conversations – my preferred alternative remains phone calls, but this causes some friction when counterparties do not agree.
- Purpose: A central fear of mine remains to be purposeless in life. Speaking to older colleagues at work, I realised that once people have children, that dominates their sense of purpose. Until then, I recognise that we really left to our own devices to find purpose, through hobbies or whatever else it takes to feel a sense of achievement. Perhaps sustaining that feeling is itself ultimate purpose of life.

One thing that renewed my sense of purpose recently was developing a viable, if ethically grey, side business. I managed to write some code to extract original high-quality images from Tempest, the official photography supplier at the majority of UK universities. They are rather abhorrent, only offering printed versions of the images and very low-resolution copies online, so my service has had reasonable interest. The first sale sparked joy I hadn't felt since perhaps boarding school, where the majority of my previous entrepreneurial (opportunistic?) activities took place. On that note, if you know of anyone across the UK who does not want to pay for a print but would like their pictures, please do get them in touch with me.

I was lucky enough to visit Morocco last week, with my family. I was expecting Marrakech to be similar to Istanbul. The narrow streets of the old city, filled with vendors and shaded by canopies, were indeed like the grand bazaar of Istanbul, but Marrakech was a lot warmer, both in terms of people and climate. A great winter sun destination, a perfect low 20s and clear skies, the flavour of mint tea, and the fragrance of orange trees set the scene for admiring architecture, hiking to waterfalls, and haggling in French.

My brother has recently found joy in obtaining good replicas of luxury goods. The object of his desire was a Gucci wallet. Doing my part, I took him around the souq whilst the parents shopped for ceramics, and bargained hard. Like in Istanbul, locals were at a loss as to where I was from given the local beard trim and fluent French. Most assumed Moroccan, but when I spoke no Arabic, guesses wandered around North Africa and Lebanon. This played to my advantage, and in most cases I was able to get prices down to a third of the starting point, to what felt like fair value. Unfortunately, my brother said a polite "Non, Merci" each time after my efforts as the wallets all had the logos printed rather than embossed, along with several other major flaws. On the final day, he was still keen to get one and dragged me along to have a final look. The first shop we stopped at, the proprietor sized us up and down following my concise and rapidly delivered response, before asking us to wait as he disappeared into the souq. Just as we reached the end of our patience, he emerged

from the crowd with another man who handed him a packet before slipping away. Finally, we'd gotten our hands on the good stuff. My brother did a full comparison against the authentic version online whilst I tried to get him to match the previous vendor's prices. He seemed aware, however, of the product's scarcity. The final price exceeded the budget we deemed reasonable by about 30%, but seeing how much my brother wanted it and knowing AliExpress purged itself of replica goods, the deal was agreed upon. On the way back, I bought some oranges for myself.

On the final day, my family had left for Casablanca for their return flight, leaving me on my own for breakfast. I opted to return to a café we had frequented on the trip, and the waiter who had looked after us enthusiastically greeted me. I was the only client there seeing as I arrived for opening time, and as I waited for my coffee after the food, I got speaking to Ibrahim beyond niceties. An unfortunate yet common story unfolded. He is a Berber, originally from a small village in the Atlas Mountains, about 280 Km from the city. Leaving for highschool and further education, he had to drop out because of a lack of funds. Because of his language skills, he managed to work his way up to the relatively fancy café I met him at, where pay was far better than the average for the role. Nonetheless, almost all of the money went back to his family to support his 4 younger sisters until they were settled. He tells me all he wants to do is return to the village and lead a simple life as a farmer, herdsman, and potter, but alas the income would be insufficient to support the higher education of his siblings. Naturally, I tipped well, but the bigger tip I offered were my contact details and insight into the Dubai hospitality industry when he expressed a desire to go abroad to earn more. He looked hopeful.

Ibrahim expressed deep seated dissatisfaction of the government and king. I pointed out major development projects such as the Ouarzazate solar plant (a \$2.8bn project), to which he retorted that such projects only benefit the elite not the working class. Doing some research, it appears he may be right. Morocco is still a net importer of energy via undersea cables to the EU energy grid in Spain. Funding terms for the project are varied across the World Bank, European Investment Bank, and African Development Bank. Unlike the UAE, where state funded solar assists with reducing unit costs to the state energy company, development bank loan repayment terms allow the project to exist but limit economic benefit for the majority of the project life to remain within Morocco. It is clear the project offers several advantages nonetheless, starting with the obvious reduced emissions, but also self-sufficiency and technology transfer. Researching the case made me realise the intricacies of the funding side of the equation. Care must be taken to prevent a modern version of resource and economic exploitation of developing nations from the more developed.

Today is my first New Year's Eve outside Dubai in memory. It will be a quiet one, given most London friends are spending time with family or are away. I will continue to reflect on all the good times this year, and wish all of you a continued sense of purpose in the coming year.

May the good times continue,

Gautam