

July - December 2023

Following the extremely last minute week in India, I decided to lay off from travel, hoping to enjoy the longest and nicest of days domestically as summer arrived in England. It ended up being quite a wet season this year, but this saved me enduring a heatwave, and a few sunny highlights emerged nonetheless.

Kicking off with a weekend in Edinburgh in August, Hibah and I travelled up to meet Shikha during her internship. A lot was packed in to a short time, with a trip to an outdoor art installation in the countryside, seeing some of the Fringe, night out in a converted church and a sunny Royal Mile dander. A weekend where I accepted sleep deprivation - the highest of honours.

Following on was Luxmie's engagement party, with her and her fiancé both looking absolutely spectacular. Shockingly, Luxmie's cousins deemed me appropriate to assist choreographing a dance for the wedding itself - a task I will swiftly ask for help with if it materialises.

At the very start of September, an almost rebellious trip to the south coast of England proved well worth it. Refusing to accept the end of summer without some outdoors to show for it, Israt and I made our way to the South Downs National park area, where we spent the day hiking across the Seven Sisters cliffs before walking along to Eastbourne. Blessed with sunshine, we basked by the chalk faces before braving the perpetually cold sea knee-deep. Great company, good views, nice weather.

Further in September, family visited to drop off my brother to university. Hosting everyone at my flat certainly makes me feel better about rent. Having my resources available as a staging ground hopefully set himself up well for success. Younger siblings have much assistance in life. It has been great having him so close, after having no family in the country for the longest time.

Madhav visited me in October, making use of his ability to work from home from abroad. Off the tourist path, I built a bonfire by the river for us. We also visited Trishna, a Michelin star Indian restaurant in Marylebone (and my first Michelin ever) - given how expensive food is in the UK, this actually appeared to be decent value for what it is. It was two weeks of quality time, and a weekend in Manchester and the Peaks was reminiscent of the freedom of the American road trip with him in 2021.

Early November brought on a weekend trip to Prague, with my now girlfriend, Amreen. Booked when her and I were only just flirting in earnest and still just friends, the trip was an exciting way to check our compatibility through the ups and downs that travel brings. Prague proved ideal for that as we quickly covered the few key sights and spent most of our time strolling about the nature in and around the city, and discussing all sorts over long breakfasts. Things have progressed nicely since that trip, as we continue to explore the relationship.

An interesting experience occurred using the toilet in the castle complex. With no one about to collect the prescribed fee, I'd used the facility, only to be aggressively barricaded from

leaving until I'd paid, when the attendant returned. Trying to explain I had no local currency (we'd used cards all throughout)

and would get money from an ATM was to no avail. Amreen luckily was in earshot of the impasse so I asked her to find an ATM as I remained detained. Eventually, flicking through my wallet, I found a 1 USD note, gladly accepted in exchange for my release- with some curses given instead of my deserved change. My views that public toilet access should be free aside, similar experiences of dollar acceptance in Vietnam later reaffirmed my view that although there has been chatter of de-dollarization of global trade, nothing beats a stack of singles to get out of pickles.

Shortly after Diwali, I took another weekend trip, this time to Brussels, with Max. It was my first time using the Eurostar and I was thoroughly impressed with the time saving reaching city centres, and convenience of completing immigration formalities in the country of departure itself. Reaching the weekend before the Christmas markets were up, we instead spent our time across the museum of musical instruments - for which Max was the ideal companion - and the city centre seeking chocolate and beer, fries and waffles. Sunday morning was a sunny bike ride from the local boulangerie to a park just outside the city, where the frangipane accompanied people watching. Finishing off with a visit to the EU parliament and accompanying museum, the Eurostar whisked us back in time for dinner.

Blink of an eye and it's the middle of December. My rotation at work has come to an end and I've quite enjoyed the farewell/Xmas party the team has organised. Lasting longer than usual, I did well over the 10 months, earning respect from my colleagues and leaving a legacy I'm happy with. I face a significant challenge as I move to the private bank investment management team next, with mini rotations of two months across fixed income, equities, and a multi asset class solution teams that relies on picking good external managers. There'll be a lot to learn whereas expectations will remain high, based on both my previous reputation and the previous analyst's work. I had carved out a niche in my previous rotation, and was given some liberty as a result of it. With the new start, it'll be longer hours and more days in the office. I also need to figure out where I'd ideally like to be full time after my rotations end in August, and network accordingly - not something I'm yet close to achieving. A key concern is knowing how much my performance varies based on my interest.

The final two weeks of the year involved a family trip to Vietnam and some time back at home in Dubai.

Northern Vietnam felt like a cleaner and less densely populated version of India, with my parents likening it to India in the 90s. The real charm seemed to be outside Hanoi, with serene boating in Trang An, massive pagoda complexes in Ninh Binh, and of course, the outcrops of Ha Long Bay. I indulged in custard apples and coconut water alongside lots of condensed milk infused Robusta coffee.

Dubai thereafter was primarily for personal maintenance, making use of the medical facilities and other higher quality services.

Looking ahead, I've finally secured a longer term Schengen visa, so can make plans with some ease from February. I'd love to organise weekend trips in particular, flying out on a Friday night. Do let me know of opportunities and interest.

I think I struggle with both the time and the patience one needs to stay in touch over texts in earnest, but I look forward to hearing about your lives on calls or in person.

Gautam

31 December 2023