

February 2022

Foreword

Hi Everyone,

It's been a busy few weeks, and I have a lot to share. But first, as usual, I'd like to take the opportunity to feel like a flight steward and extend a warm welcome to the frequent readers.

I've got a job offer, had a fantastic weekend with friends from London visiting, a 10-day long trip to Turkey and London, with more on the horizon.

The offer

I'm excited to disclose my job hunt has led to my first full-time offer in the Global Consumer Banking Division with Citi in London. I've not had a change of heart, it still lies in the lab, but until better options emerge, I'm glad to have secured some stability for the immediate future.

Certain details remain to be determined, particularly with the start date they want overlapping with university considerably, so here's to hoping there's no hiccups. If those of you currently working in the industry have any top tips for me, I'm all ears.

It really does feel like a numbers and probability game. I had an exam the day of a BofA assessment centre, and there were no alternative provisions. Equally, there are still rejections coming in every day. Everything considered, I'd be lying if I didn't say I wasn't grinning all day when I heard back, and I feel blessed to have friends who felt happiness *for* me.

I am particularly interested to hear of what paying taxes entitles Tier 2 visa holders to in terms of access to public services. I'm also still looking for someone who works in the division at the moment to gauge how reasonable the salary is for the hours, and equally, if any of you are willing to share, the salaries in your divisions for graduate programs for your typical hours.

I'd only considered Citi when I'd spoken to one of you, probably at Naseem's party on the 5th of October – thank you.

The visit

What's in a fragrance? We're not exposed to them on demand in the same way as other senses and so they remain more special, I think. A whiff of jasmine immediately takes me warm spring skies at home in Dubai. It's why I like to spray correspondence with some perfume – the one sense I can't email. The discussion also lends itself to questioning the claim of identity that gifts of perfume entail.

Currently however, the most pertinent fragrance around me is a medium-note biased sweet, fruity, floral perfume trapped in my bathroom, acting as a temporary reminder of the fantastic weekend to have gone by.

Adya and Rose came up to visit from London, giving me an excuse to forget about everything else for two and a bit days. Adya had the chance to check out a little bit of the Northern Quarter's vibe with us heading for pizza (where I tried my first-ever Calzone) and ducking into a bowling and arcade centre after dinner, where she promptly had me grappling with her ping pong skills. The calzone I'll repeat, the ping pong...eh why not; Adya doesn't otherwise make me run around.

Rose joined us the next morning, bringing with her a bouquet of tulips, marking the first time I've been gifted any. Flowers naturally tie in with fragrance, getting increasingly dense and sickly sweet as they begin to wilt. Oh to go out with a bang.¹

I've been asked whether I primarily tend to live in the past, present or future. I want to say the past features least, but there are certain thoughts that persist. At the moment, it's how I forgot to add a dash of chilli flakes to the otherwise strong avocado-egg-za'atar we whipped up for breakfast. Cooking for other people is a double-edged sword, especially if the guests get involved. I think it's a fantastic way to bond and spend time not to mention the lasting memories good food creates, but equally, mistakes are more impactful.

From there, we head out to the Peak District, aiming for the Trinnacle – not far from the Dovestone Reservoir viewpoint I previously ticked off. For the sake of time, we decided to drive it instead of the train+walk option, and that proved to be an experience. I'd not driven a manual car for any considerable distance since passing my test about two years ago, so I went on a short, uneventful 40-minute drive two days prior to refine my skill. When it came to driving through the weekend rush, things were slightly more involved, and it led to all three of us supporting the driving effort with navigational and other aids. A few unexpected stalls didn't help either, but as expected, the way back was much smoother. I don't know if they'll want to repeat the experience, but I certainly hope they felt sufficiently safe.

As we got started with the trail, conditions weren't bad. We had a nice view of a reservoir and it wasn't raining, though the already wet and boggy ground reinforced Adya's concerns with how feasible the endeavour was. As we steadily crept up, a bad weather front set in, and rain turned to hail. The winds were channelled through the surrounding peaks, and though I didn't have an anemometer, I'd estimate them to be between 30-40 mph. I was lucky that Adya and Rose maintained the right attitude and had the grit to see things through. When things take a turn for the difficult, it really does come down to the support you can offer each other. Eventually, we reached a ridge line with a very slow incline that wrapped around a peak. In the interest of time and to get shelter from the incessantly battering winds, we decided to go off the trail and crest the peak early to rejoin the trail on the other side. Unfortunately for us, the top was also very much a plateau, but with rivulets and bog making up most of the terrain. After Rose nearly had her boot pulled off her foot, we proceeded with more caution, though we'd long abandoned any hopes of keeping our feet dry. Eventually, the Trinnacle came into sight and we briefly ducked out of the worst of the wind. As we arrived, two mad men were atop the rock formation – about 8 metres high and sheer, with a few hundred meters to drop.

As they left, we spent a few moments appreciating the scene in front of us. In the backdrop, a reservoir nearly overflowing with a narrow country road highlighting the connected nature of English national parks. In between, the fast-moving rain and hail clearly forming sheets, and right in front of us, water and wind eroded spires that we would later analyse to find monkeys, snakes, and even Ganesha embodied.

It's worth pointing out that despite the challenge we faced, the conversation remained as varied and engaging as ever. Surpassing food, good conversation most strongly reinforces the good times feeling to me in hindsight, even if the details aren't recollected. Both of them are amongst the easiest to have that flow with at the moment. Rose, in particular, is a gifted conversation starter,

¹ As a side note, research the tulip market bubble in the Netherlands. Fascinating.

coming up with the most random question that then sparks an hour or two of flitting from topic to topic not just with me but also with anyone else I've observed her with.

The situation continued to get increasingly uncomfortable on the way back, with us drenched despite our waterproof layers and therefore much colder. We attempted to crest the peak again to take the shortest path possible, but the bearing I picked was out and we spent about ten extra minutes exposed to the worst of the elements. It may sound relatively minor but at that time, everything counted. When we finally returned to the trail head, we were especially glad to have brought the car as we sat and warmed up in the cabin, appreciating how sapping the hour long walk to the station would have been. Once we'd showered off and warmed up at home, I put together chole chawal (Punjabi style chickpea curry) that left me very proud and made for perfect comfort food after the day's rigour.

The gist of the rest of the weekend continued to be food and conversation, so I'll wrap up this section here, but not before stating for the record it was one of the nicest weekends I've had in Manchester, and of course, mentioning I now have a bansuri in G which meant it was a lot easier to play in conjunction with Adya's singing which led to much time slipping away. Rose left slightly before Adya, which left Adya and I sipping coffee from the corner armchairs that many of you have seen in pictures. Overlooking the non-existent sunset, the vibe slowed and relaxed – tangibly in my case with the speed I speak. There are certain moments one wishes lasts a little longer but alas the trains wait for no one. Adya also really stood out as a guest by leaving me with a card to say thanks, something I strongly appreciated.

Turkey

I had a week off after exams – really the only true time off September-September. I'd be loathed to stay in Manchester for such a unique opportunity, so I packed my bag (hand luggage only fares of course) and set off for what was meant to be sunnier and warmer shores.

Many people have asked me how the solo travel experience was and expressed their desire to do something similar. This wasn't my first solo trip and likely won't be the last, but let me be clear, it is much nicer to travel with 1-2 more people. Any more than that and they dynamic completely changes and the experience can go either way.

I've often overflown the European and Turkish mountain ranges on the way between Dubai and London, but from considerable height in A380s. The A320 I was on this time gave me a much closer look at some of the features below, and I was lucky enough to be seated next to a woman who flew the route every fortnight, and so knew everything worth seeing. A highlight was getting a clear view of the Çanakkale "1915" suspension bridge. It spans the sea of Marmara between Gallipoli and the Asian half of Turkey and is the longest suspension bridge in the world. The clouds parted over the sea and the sun glinted off the white arches, an imposing reminder of Turkey's persistent effort at regional hegemony.

I started off in Antalya, a small Roman-era city on the Mediterranean typically catering to Russian and German tourists looking for some sun. I'd booked to stay in a private room in a hostel to try out what the social side of a hostel was like without having to start in the deep end. Given it was the shoulder season, I got a fantastic room just off the main shopping street for £18 a night. The atmosphere was as I'd hoped- other visitors congregated at meal times and into the night in a common area by the kitchen, where seasoned hostel dwellers including a 38 year old Kazakh woman shared their wildest experiences and gave me some perspective on where we were currently staying. Common themes included lamenting the then closure of southeast Asia, obviously a

backpacking favourite, and commenting on how cheap my flight from the UK to Antalya was compared to theirs from Asia despite similar flight durations.

The city itself is fascinating. My hostel was named *flâneur* and I completely felt like one as I wandered through Roman era streets and Ottoman era bazaars down to a marina where fishermen were bringing in the catch. A short while later I found myself seated in front of the biggest breakfast spread I could ever fathom. Turkish people see breakfast as the most important meal and I was definitely a fan. A well-cooked deep bodied paste made of peppers and tomatoes called *Ajuk* caught my attention, reminiscent but nicer than *muhammara*. Jams of all manner accompanied fresh bread, not of strawberry or apricot for that would be too mainstream, no we were dealing with gooseberry and other Turkish fruits. A range of cheeses embellished the possible permutations but what surprised me most was the prevalence of hazelnut. If someone told me *Nutella* was made in Turkey I'd believe them. Eggs add some heft, made with onion and tomato not unlike *desi anda bhurji*, and to top everything off, a bowl of honey and cream similar to clotted cream finished off the meal. Tea was of course limitless. The meals in Antalya were a fantastic introduction to Turkish food with high authenticity and at even cheaper prices than Istanbul, but a particularly attentive and woke café near the famous Galata Tower that prized itself on serving organic food had some of the nicest breakfast I've ever had. The hot food was augmented with potato and cheese pancakes, and a flatbread with spinach that's not quite like a *fatayer* or a *paratha*. Even the butter was memorable. None of the jams were too sweet, and it was all tied together by a view overlooking the neighbourhood in the shadows of the Tower.

I eventually wandered across the city to a beach. Most of Antalya has rather jagged cliffs, leaving the party vibes Lara beach to the east and the Konyaalti waterfront to the west. The water was on the uncomfortably cold side, but probably swimmable with a wetsuit. The beach was however unguarded and deserted so I kept my distance, admiring the clarity of the water near me and the vivid turquoise shades in the distance. What pulled the scene together were the snow-capped mountains in the backdrop. It is, in theory, possible to ski and swim on the same day from Antalya.

Given my luck, I was visiting in one of the approximately two weeks a year it rains there. Getting off the beach to shelter until it subsided, I found myself walking through a residential neighbourhood not unlike those in Gurgaon or Pune. Clothes hung from balconies, and service-oriented stores lined the street level. I'd been thinking about getting a shave from a Turkish barber, having heard of their skill and so found the nearest one on Google and plotted a course. On the way, I came across a shop in a basement, just about visible from street level, with but a simple board advertising the trade of the establishment. What won me over was the fact that there were two 60 odd year-old barbers serving two clients. A full shop! Note that this shop wasn't on the map. I decided to give it a go and wandered in. I was greeted by not only both barbers, but also both customers. I nodded and reaffirmed a strong hello in Turkish. This was a mistake on my part because my blank looks at the ensuing barrage of conversation directed at me was not taken kindly – I think they thought I was being rude until they realised the language barrier. Turkish has overlaps with French, Arabic, and Hindi so I was able to catch a few key words. This in conjunction with some Google translate and a lot of hand gestures later, I was well on my way to getting a beard trim. I thoroughly enjoyed my time on the chair, catching on bits and pieces leaving me to put them into context as the barber spoke to his colleague and other waiting clients. Towards the end, I decided to play with fire. Asking the barber with gestures, I got him to use the traditional technique of dipping cotton into alcohol, and setting it alight to then singe off hair around the ears- an experience. Before coming to Turkey, I'd developed the impression every merchant would be out to get me. Whilst this may generally hold true, the barber in the sleepy housing estate did not have an agenda. There were

a few menu options with the word “beard” in Turkish on them. Prepared to pay for the most expensive one, I got back more change, winning my trust. I may have slightly ripped off nonetheless, but I’ll never know and so it’ll never matter. It was £2 in all in any case.

The real fun started after this trim. With my slightly curly hair, mixed English accent (I avoided Irish) I may have passed off as middle eastern. With the beard done up in the local style, I apparently looked quite Turkish. Vendors tried to sell me snacks rather than trinkets. Suddenly, a new side of the city began to appear. A majority of the city’s residents appeared to be pensioners, perhaps moved from Istanbul to bide their time in the sun. An admirable culture has formed around chai in the evenings. Outdoor seating at cafes begin to fill up from around 4pm, men and women each with group members coming and going. What’s nicer is that if they find anyone sitting alone, they often invite them to join the table. With the trim, I was extended this courtesy, though the language barrier proved insurmountable with the older folk. I think the secret to Antalya’s happiness lies in the 4-6pm chai and conversations.

Istanbul proved to be a different beast entirely. Younger people dominated and the hustle and bustle rivalled that of Delhi. There was still snow on the ground, following an unseasonal storm a week prior. Prices instantly felt steeper, and theft felt more likely, but equally, the city felt better dressed and more refined. Food made for a big part of my experience as detailed above. Along with that, Ottoman era Islamic architecture that propped up in not only mosques but also public buildings was stunning. Sailing along the Bosphorus, I was neck and neck with container ships and tankers navigating from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean – forming a trade route all the way to Russia.

I had the chance to speak to a young woman working in a bank’s museum at length on one of the afternoons given there wasn’t much footfall. We exchanged viewpoints and stories that really helped both of us understand a lot about the respective cultures. One thing she struggled to explain was how stray dogs are so fondly cared for by locals. Unlike in India where many strays are injured, rabid and generally disliked, passer-bys will pet strays in Istanbul. Kebab shop owners will toss them some meat time and again. The municipality tags and tracks them. Much artwork depicting the city features a dog somewhere in the scene, for good reason.

Looking Ahead

I could perhaps go on – the Turkish trip certainly has more takeaways to draw. These emails are however getting consistently longer, so I may save those stories for the proverbial campfire.

It’s a busy time. I’m planning to go to Northern Ireland next weekend finally, to see Zack and brush up on the accent. Uni goes up and down in waves, but the societies keep me reliably occupied a few days of the week. I plan to be in London from 10-13 March for my own Imperial grad, I am keen to meet some of you. There’s also a trip to Iceland on the horizon which I am very excited for.

If any of you would like to come up and visit before May, drop some dates and let’s see what’s doable.