

1st Wychwood Guides

On a bitterly cold Saturday morning in January, I joined Tracy, Sally and eight Guides on Kingham station for a trip to London. The gale force wind was roaring down the platform as we waited for the train, and I came to regret my comment that "It might not be so bad when we get in amongst the buildings in London".

The train was very full but we all managed to find seats within sight of each other and before too long we were pulling into Paddington. We had decided to see the city on a Big Bus Company tour, starting from outside the station but we had no idea where to find the bus-stop. While we were looking, a flower-shop owner whisked us into his shop, sold us bus tickets and took us round the corner to the first bus-stop! Here we were greeted by a very friendly Big Bus ticket inspector who explained the routes to us and waved us on our way when the first bus arrived.

The beauty of this bus tour is that you can hop off at any stop, take in whichever sight you fancy and then rejoin the tour on the next bus. We had decided to have a look round Covent Garden as our first 'sight' and enjoyed ourselves watching the buskers and looking round the shops and the market stalls.

The first priority for the Guides seemed to be to spend the pocket-money they had with them! Back at the bus-stop we were soon back on the bus heading for the City and the Tower and the time seemed right to eat our packed lunches as we passed the Monument and St Paul's.

At the Tower we hopped off again, walked round the outside of the ancient walls and were caught in a heavy shower of rain. Luckily the Tower gift shop is outside the gate so we were able to shelter in there until the rain stopped. We just had time for photo call before heading to Tower Pier to catch a boat along the Thames to Waterloo pier (all included in the bus-ticket price!)

From the river we saw many famous buildings, including the Globe Theatre and Drake's Golden Hind (yes, I know it is only a replica, but it looked magnificent in the sunshine!). We stepped off the boat right by the London Eye, which was not working due to technical problems, but looked awesome – it is HUGE.

We walked across the river once more and up to Parliament Square where we again picked up the bus tour to Buckingham Palace. We were too late for the Changing of the Guard but we still enjoyed taking photos and watching the soldiers.

By now we were running out of time so we adapted our schedule accordingly, it was back to the bus-stop once more for the last leg of our trip.

As we stood at the stop watching various buses pass I kept telling the girls that we had to wait for a Big Bus; it was some time before I realised that all buses are big and they had not realised that we were waiting for a particular bus owned by the BIG BUS COMPANY.

Our final stop was a quick whizz round Harrods (what sophisticated little souls our Guides are), the aim was to buy anything, just so long as it was placed in a green carrier bag with the famous gold logo.

After another short wait we caught the last bus back to Paddington, more luck than judgement as we had not realised that it really was the last bus along the route that day. We checked our finances and had enough to buy burgers and chips all round at the station (although I chose a bowl of soup. Have you any idea how cold it can be on an open topped bus in January?).

Back on the train and heading for home we all realised how tired we felt and how lovely it was to be out of the wind. We had all enjoyed a very exciting visit to London and had managed to pack in many different sights and experiences.

If you go on a day-trip look out for those big buses – they are a very simple way to get around and see all the tourist attractions. As my husband tells people I don't "do Guides any more" but I am lucky enough to be invited along to the fun outings, so thank you for taking me along with you.

Christine Halliday.

