

A good time for timeless Britain

BREXIT FROM F1

But, intoning “left-left-left” at every turn, we set out on a week-long sea-to-sea drive across Britain, crossing borders that now seem more meaningful between Wales, England and Scotland, regions of the country that all viewed the leave vote differently. In every corner of the country, we found a post-Brexit tourist scene that was considerably cheaper for Americans and still wrestling with what kind of Britain it wants to be for its returning fans.

“We’re in God’s hands now,” said Molly Breakspear, a tour guide in one of England’s most shamelessly backward-looking tourist sites: Highclere Castle, the still-occupied country mansion that is universally recognizable as the set of “Downton Abbey.” We made this PBS pilgrimage on our drive to Cardiff, Wales, where we would officially begin our cross-country tour.

Standing in that unmistakable red library — furnished for the real-life Earl of Carnarvon exactly as it is for the fictional Earl of Grantham — it is easy to imagine the globe before globalism. The house — like the show — is a window on another age. Maybe not a simpler one, but one with no crowds of Germans, Americans and Arabs driving the hour from London and paying for the pleasure of treading up the magnificent oak staircase or putting on bad Mr. Carson accents in the dining room lined with oil paintings.

“It certainly hasn’t hurt us yet,” Breakspear said above the multinational murmur. “Plenty of Europeans still and quite a number of English people this year.”

One early effect of Brexit has been an uptick in Britons vacationing in Britain.

“What we’re seeing right now is a strong staycation market,” said Patricia Yates, director of Visit Britain, the country’s national tourism board, reporting a 10 percent jump in in-country tourism.

Even among continentals, the post-Brexit fall of the pound seems to have compensated for whatever affront they may have taken. But officials worry that the vote may feel like a snub in the longer term. Most respondents in a snap survey commissioned after the vote said that they were no less likely to come to Britain, but suddenly Europeans, at 69 percent, were far less likely than Americans (84 percent) and Chinese (88 percent) to say that the country is “welcoming to visitors.”

“You can see there is some scope for improvement there,” Yates said. “It’s something we’re going to be very mindful of.”

To in-bound Americans, the cost benefits of Brexit were quickly apparent, even in the quid-hemorrhaging zone of London where we started our week. In August, with the pound two months away from a 31-year low against the dollar, we had a choice of central city hotels for under \$200 a night and the fish and chips we had before visiting the Tate Gallery felt 20 percent less like pickpocketry



JOHN JAMES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



NIKLAS HALLE'N/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE VIA GETTY IMAGES



KATHY DEWITT/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The main street winds through the Cotswolds town of Winchcombe in Gloucestershire, England; a healthy helping of fish and chips at Lloyd’s in Lampeter, Wales; Highclere Castle in Southern England, the iconic setting for the PBS series “Downton Abbey,” delivers a strong sense of déjà vu.



THE WASHINGTON POST

ner filled with nutmeg. At a world food festival in Duke of York Square, a huge crowd of Londoners queued up for Jamaican beef patties and duck sandwiches with hoisin sauce.

“It wasn’t the cities, you know,” said Harry Amir, a student/Uber driver who was eating an empanada. “You won’t find many here who are enthusiastic about being less in the whirl of things.”

We found that to be the case in Cardiff, as well, when we settled into the St. David’s Hotel on the edge of the harbor with long view toward the Bristol Channel. Wales overall voted narrowly to leave the E.U., but this port city voted to remain. After our obligatory view of Cardiff Castle, which has been a defensive keep in the heart of the city since Roman times, we mingled with locals at the waterfront restaurant row and found mostly Brexit skeptics.

Carys Stanton is one of many job-seeking migrants from the Welsh countryside who remain enchanted with the foreign young people she works with at Las Igua-

nas, a Brazilian cantina, as well as the global clientele she serves.

“It’s like the world comes to Cardiff here,” Stanton said, just after delivering some fishbowl-sized margaritas to a table of Mandarin speakers. “I would hate to see that change. I don’t know anyone that voted to leave, except for my grandfather.”

The next day, we drove northwest on the A48 and, after a last gasp of Welsh pronunciation at the town of “Pwllmyeric,” we passed a sign: “Welcome to England.” (On the other side, it read: “Croeso I Gymru,” or “Welcome to Wales.”) In my previous visits to Britain, the borders between Wales, England and Scotland felt like subtle historical artifacts. But in the wake of Brexit, there is real talk of a sovereign divorce. Scotland, which voted heavily to stay in the E.U., looks ready to revisit the secession vote that narrowly failed to pass two years ago.

We sped into the rolling velds of England’s Cotswolds, choosing the narrowest, most agrarian lanes possible in the direction of

Stratford-upon-Avon, our next overnight. It seemed impossible that any global upheaval could disrupt this rolling patchwork of sheep fields studded with tawny stone villages.

“My English countryside meter is in the red,” Isabel said with disbelief as we emerged from the green woodland tunnel into the high street of Winchcombe, a preserved-in-amber Anglo-Saxon village that practically chloroforms you with Old World appeal. And yet, everything’s up-to-date in Winchcombe Village. The traditional cider we had at the Lion Inn went equally well with my fancy foodie-grade wild mushroom risotto as with Isabel’s hearty bangers and mash. Both were served by Ula, a 20-something from Warsaw. American blues icon John Lee Hooker growled from hidden speakers.

When I made my first pilgrimage to Britain 30 years ago, it was understood that eating bad food and sleeping in cold houses was simply the price of admission. Now, of course, a global foodie

culture fueled by cooks from around the world and produce from all of Europe gushing from the Chunnell has transformed the tourist’s mealtime.

We lingered over good French cheese. On our walk out to the village highlight — Sudeley, a 15th-century castle — we felt that all was right with the worlds, old and new.

We spent the next two nights in the reactor core of traditional English-major tourism, the living Elizabethan shrine of Stratford and the incomparable vistas of William Wordsworth’s Lake District. Here, a love of words runs deep, but so does a love of outside visitors. (Another happy find in the very center of Stratford: a room in the worthy Arden Hotel for about \$160 a night. I have paid more.)

Sonya Gomez, who works for a hospital outside of her native Madrid, first came to Stratford in the 1980s with her Shakespeare-loving father. Now she is back with her own son, who may not adore

BREXIT CONTINUED ON F5

PENNSYLVANIA

In the Poconos, Blue Mountain Resort keeps a snow family at peak performance

BY LESLIE HSU OH

At Blue Mountain Resort, the only mountain in Pennsylvania to offer family-sized tubes, I finally find a thrilling activity that my entire family can enjoy. With an eight-year age span among my children, we can’t even watch something on TV together that’s suitable or enjoyable for our respective ages, so this is a big deal.

Whipping down a 1,000-foot snowtubing park lane, my husband seems to have a hand on each of us, making sure no one gets thrown out of the tube. I can see reflected in my children’s eyes what every father wants his family to believe: Dad has superhero powers that can protect us anytime, anywhere. Riley, 2, can’t decide whether to scream or laugh as she curls into a ball around my legs. I manage to cling to the safety line and try not to lose my iPhone while filming all of this. Ethan, 7, attempts to break the laws of gravity, his face screwed tight against the wind. Kyra, 10, lets her limbs flail wildly about to her delight. In

slow motion, I see the rush of speed she has always craved take her breath away.

It’s the grand finale to an action-packed day that began with snowboarding at the top of the resort. Because we had enrolled Kyra and Ethan in the resort’s renowned youth competition program, Blue Mountain Racing, we spent about 10 weekends getting to know this family-owned retreat a little more than 200 miles from the District. Located along the Kittatinny Ridge, it features the most varied terrain and the highest vertical drop (1,082 feet) in Pennsylvania.

Another attraction: On Feb. 4, during the Winter Festival, anyone age 10 and older can take a run down a luge track complete with curves and timing equipment. Participants can win prizes and learn the basics of accelerating, steering and stopping. Coaches and former luge Olympians will scout for youth who show potential on a natural luge track open to the public. (Sochi Olympian Summer Britcher was discovered at one of these USA Luge Challenges.)

Because Blue Mountain Resort has facilities located on both the peak and the bottom, we kicked things off that day snowboarding as a family. It was not the first time our 2-year-old had snowboarded but the first time we would take some runs with her.

Riley told her siblings to be quiet. She had no emotion on her chubby face, just a quiet determination to prove she was cool enough to hang with big sister and big brother. Adjusting her helmet, she pointed her 70mm snowboard rental straight down the slope and pumped with her legs. Earlier that morning, in her first-ever private lesson, her instructor asked, “Did you notice that she does that to pick up speed? I did not teach her that.” Neither did we.

Utilizing terrain-based learning, in which shaped snow controls speed, Blue Mountain Resort’s snow features allowed Riley to feel as though she could do tricks just like Kyra and Ethan. By the end of the 1½-hour lesson, Riley’s instructor had her doing

SKIING CONTINUED ON F5



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BLUE MOUNTAIN RESORT



TOP: Blue Mountain Resort, nestled in Pennsylvania’s Pocono Mountains, is known for the 1,000-foot lanes at its snowtubing park. LEFT: Snowboarders also have a home at the resort, with built-in stunt spots along the highest vertical drop (1,082 feet) in the state.

BREXIT FROM F4

the Bard like his grandfather, but was willing to endure a production of "King Lear" for his mother's sake.

"He preferred London," Gomez said as her son took a smartphone picture of the canal boats tied along the banks of the Avon outside the Royal Shakespeare Company complex.

The made-for-tourists town looked very much the same, she said, although the buses that deposited so many Japanese visitors 25 years ago are now filled with Chinese ones.

"I was upset with the vote, yes," she said. "I love the idea of greater Europe. But I do not feel any less welcome here than I did when I first came. The vote was about fear and politics. Being a visitor is about people."

We were on our way to our own RSC play, a gritty modern take on immigration and culture clash called "Fall of the Kingdom, Rise of the Foot Soldier." It was part of the theater's intentionally provocative "Making Mischief" series and it splashed acetate on the

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Molly Breakspear, a tour guide at Highclere Castle

polite veneer of the English for a searing look at themes of racism, fanaticism and fear of the other that have echoes all over the globe.

"Wow," Isabel said as we emerged from black-box theater both sobered and grateful for an experience of language that is always one of the joys of visiting Britain. "At least we're not the only country so messed up."

If we wound ourselves up in Stratford, we uncoiled delightfully at Linthwaite House, a superb country hotel in Windermere that has been a favorite of mine for many years. It sits on the brow of a hillside, and the view from the terrace extends over Lake Windermere and a sky full of the puffy whites that inspired Wordsworth's wandering "lonely as a cloud."

Here we divided our time between the hotel's excellent dining room, cribbage amid the grove of overstuffed chairs in the lounge and long rambles in the countryside. That is a Lake District tourist routine perfected by the Victorians and only improved on with the international influence that has descended on local pubs and restaurants.

Yet, in an age of churning influence, it can be hard to remember what comes from where. I was foolishly marveling that good IPAs had reached the remote and ancient Cuckoo Brow Inn during our longest hike when Isabel reminded me the Brits had *invented* the beer that is now the darling of American microbrews.

At dinner, the Cumbrian lamb was served by a nurse from Krakow who is working at the hotel in order to sharpen her English enough for a medical job.

"To be honest, some of our staff were a bit unnerved by the [Brexit] vote," said Andrew Nicholson, the general manager. "The Romanians and the Poles were asking, 'What's going to happen to us now?' But no one has asked them



ROBERT HARDING/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



INCAMERASTOCK/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

TOP: As night falls on Waterloo Place, the Scottish city of Edinburgh is set in silhouette.
ABOVE: A shop on the Royal Mile offers a selection of kilts — for kids and ladies, too.

SKIING FROM F4

straight glides on a box and heel-side, toe-side turns. Joe Forte, director of Blue Mountain Snowsports and the reason that many parents are so loyal to the resort, trains 350 to 400 instructors per year. On a busy Saturday, Blue Mountain can easily teach more than 1,200 students in more than a dozen languages; many instructors are bilingual.

Forte asks his instructors to find out why people come to the resort; that's to give them the experience they paid for.

"We want them to leave feeling like they have become a skier or snowboarder regardless of what skills they've mastered at the end of a session. We have one opportunity to wow them and get it right. Show them why we love skiing and snowboarding."

"Let go!" Riley demanded, until Ethan released her riglet reel, a retractable cord attached to her board. As Riley started to pick up speed down the slope, I could feel other parents tense up. They were judging me for shooting photos of my husband and the kids shredding against the bluest sky I had ever seen above the Pocono Mountains.

Kyra landed a 180. Ethan maneuvered around me and popped an ollie. "Mommy, you're not doing your turns right. Let me show you how." Clearing my throat, I was

just about to remind Ethan that I have been snowboarding for nearly 20 years when my husband whipped by, saying, "Wait until you have to ride a lift with him." Both kids have matured in riding skills and confidence under the tutelage of coaches such as head snowboard coach Mike Clark, who preaches: "Give some respect to gain some respect." (Program alumni are often on the podium at USASA Nationals. Coach Ben Clark, Mike's son, won gold this year in BoarderCross.)

Because she didn't bother with turns and all she did was pump, Riley gained so much speed that she was cruising ahead of Kyra and Ethan. Fortunately, the terrain at the bottom of School Hill naturally slowed her down. In the meantime, my husband, along with Kyra and Ethan, skirted the courtyard and deck of Summit Lodge, and continued on down several black diamonds. Riley was left behind with me.

She wasn't happy about it: She ripped off a glove in disgust and slammed it onto the snow. Before I could reach her, a skier from Blue Mountain Racing stopped to check on her. He picked up her glove and took the time to tighten it onto her slippery fingers. The majority of the riders and skiers you encounter on the slopes are in the Blue Mountain Racing program, which trains them to be

If you go

WHERE TO STAY
Sayre Mansion

250 Wyandotte St., Bethlehem (For GPS, use 431 West 3rd St., Bethlehem, Pa. 18015)
877-345-9019

<https://sayremansion.com>

This boutique bed-and-breakfast is 30 minutes from Blue Mountain Resort. While we stayed in one of three Carriage House suites, there are also 19 mansion rooms. Rooms start at \$139.

Staybridge Suites

1787a Airport Rd. Allentown
610-443-5000

bit.ly/StaybridgeSuitesAllentown
Located about 20 minutes from Blue Mountain Resort, the hotel features a heated outdoor pool and an indoor whirlpool. Suites start at \$95.

WHERE TO EAT
Slopeside Pub and Grill

1660 Blue Mountain Dr., Palmerton
610-824-1557

skibluemt.com/dining-lodging/on-mountain-dining/slopeside-pub-and-grill

Open year-round, enjoy indoor and

outdoor lunch, après and dinner at this award-winning American pub-style restaurant. Entrees start at \$11.

Cornerstone

1660 Blue Mountain Dr., Palmerton
610-824-1557

skibluemt.com/dining-lodging/on-mountain-dining/cornerstone
Cornerstone offers a quick pit stop for anyone who's in a hurry and enjoys eating outdoors. Entrees start at \$9.50.

WHAT TO DO
Blue Mountain Resort

1660 Blue Mountain Dr., Palmerton
610-826-7700

skibluemt.com
Open Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 10 p.m., Saturday, Sunday, and holidays, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Eight-hour lift tickets cost \$55 to \$70 for adults and \$45 to \$55 for children ages 6 to 12.

INFORMATION
skipa.com

— L.O.

For the author's full list of recommendations for a trip to Blue Mountain Resort, visit washingtonpost.com/travel

If you go

WHERE TO STAY
The Arden Hotel

44 The Waterside
Stratford-upon-Avon
011-44-17-8929-8682

theardenhotelstratford.com

A comfortable, luxurious maze of a place, steps from most of what you want to do in the Bard's abode. Rooms from about \$163.

Linthwaite House

Crook Road
Bowness-on-Windermere
011-44-15-3948-8600

linthwaitehouse.com

A superb country inn, built and staffed by lovers of the hotelier's art. Rooms from about \$152.

WHAT TO DO
Highclere Castle
(The "Downton Abbey" house)

Highclere Park,
Highclere, Newbury
011-44-16-3525-3210

highclerecastle.co.uk

Any fan of National Trust-type great houses would love Highclere. But its star turn is what has led to an explosion of visitors. Open seasonally. Castle and garden admission begins at \$19 for adults.

INFORMATION

visitbritain.com/us/en

— S.H.

to leave so far. Our bookings are holding up."

Our last frontier was at Gretna Green on our drive to Edinburgh. Here the sign that reads "Scotland Welcomes You" sits near a colossal pile of small stones that has become a monument to unity. Nervous Brits from both sides of the River Sark began depositing the rocks in 2014 as a way of beseeching Scottish nationals to vote against breaking away from the United Kingdom.

The results of that referendum narrowly saved the relationship that goes back three centuries, but the Brexit result led many to predict that the separatists could yet prevail. Scotland's overwhelming "remain" vote this summer revealed it to be the most Eurocentric part of the country. Rather than be pulled unwillingly from the E.U., Scots could well choose to leave Britain.

Truly, it's hard to imagine a scene more worldly than the teeming streets of Edinburgh. At the height of the city's infamous annual Fringe Festival, the Royal Mile was chockablock with revelers, free thinkers and good timers from several continents. Hawkers thrust bills into our hands at every corner, flogging some of the performances going on in pubs, theaters and pop-up party spaces up and down the city center.

The next morning, before heading to our flights home, we would make our way to the waterfront and a book-end glimpse of the North Sea to complete our pell-mell dash across Britain. But that last night we would spend with Canadian comics, English transvestites, South African playwrights and, even, a friendly band of Scottish Quakers.

It was an unabashed, and uniquely British, celebration of creativity without borders. For this lifelong lover of all-things British, it felt like a vibe both familiar and unlikely to end any time soon.

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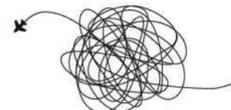
How 2016 added up for our top traveler

BY ANDREA SACHS

The year started with such small digits — one rental car, no confiscated goods, a few thousand air miles. But over 12 months of travel, the numbers turned into a real math equation that required a calculator when I ran out of fingers and toes. For this end-of-the-year review, I am letting the digits tell the story. I will reset the odometer in 2017 and watch the adventures grow from zero.

58,256

Air miles flown. The largest mileage count for one trip: 21,623 around the world. The shortest: 213 miles to New York.



15

Different airlines. There were some old standards (American, JetBlue, United), some new additions (Air Seychelles, Air India) and a few paper airplanes (Emetebe, FIGAS, InterCaribbean).

19

Longest number of nights away. I couldn't rush seven countries on three continents, could I?

12

Countries visited, plus 13 states. Unfortunately, flyovers don't count, but if they did...



13

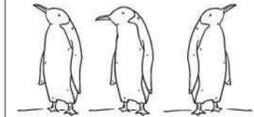
Islands explored. I don't play favorites, but (in a stage whisper) I really hope to see you again, Madagascar, Falklands, and Turks and Caicos.

6

Rental cars used, including a Jucy camper van and a Maserati Quattroporte GTS.

3,602

Greatest number of miles I put on a rental car. Eight states on Route 66, plus a lot of U-turns and detours.



15

Number of penguins I slept with at a California museum slumber party, plus nearly half a million in the wild in the Falkland Islands.

2

Items confiscated by security: face wash at the Reykjavik airport and a banana in the Galapagos, which I saved from destruction by quickly eating it.

0

Missed flights. I learned my lesson from the last incident: Don't deliberate over bagel flavors at the airport deli when your plane is boarding.

10

Number of new Facebook/WhatsApp/Twitter/Instagram friends made while traveling. May our paths cross again. I'd like that.

WASHINGTON POST STAFF ILLUSTRATION AND ISTOCKPHOTO

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