

# Chatroom London

## Insider's tip is to get outside

**Scott Podmore** connects online with Arden Hanley, an expatriate working in and loving London

**SP: Hello Arden, tell us a little about your background and what you were up to before moving to London.**

**AH:** I grew up in the Latrobe Valley, about two hours out of Melbourne. Straight out of school, I started working in radio and that took me to a bunch of different locations around Australia, working my way up through the ranks. The last Australian city I lived in was Melbourne. I spent almost five years there working for Nova 100.

**And London came calling?**

**AH:** In 2006, Alice (my wife) and I decided that, at 27, if we wanted to see the world we'd better get on with it before we couldn't get working holiday visas any more, had children or other bits of life got in the way. The UK's a pretty safe choice for Australian travellers, with some good visa options available, and it helps that Alice had British heritage, so I got to ride on her coat tails. I was lucky

enough to get work fairly soon after we arrived, with 95.8 Capital FM in London. Capital's based in Leicester Square, so I get to go to work right in the heart of London.

**What do you miss most about home?**

**AH:** Apart from all our friends and families (Facebook is a vital connection in making sure they get to see what we're up to and our son Rupert, I, grow up), the things we miss most are brunch in a Melbourne cafe, decent beaches and Vegemite in proper-sized jars. We live about 40 minutes' drive from the water, but Southend-on-Sea's not a patch on Australian beaches.

**Tell us a bit about what makes London so special.**

**AH:** Having lived in close to London and now further out, we've experienced two sides to the city. It's without a doubt one of the most interesting cities in the world, full of history, different styles of architecture, different cultures and lots to experience. Once you get past the standard tourist attractions, it's also a brilliant city to discover things in. There are lots of little lanes and alleys that hide a little pub or quirky shop that you'd never know about unless you went exploring, and the style and character can change in the space of streets rather than suburbs because



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the city is so dense.

**What would you recommend to a traveller visiting for the first time?**

**AH:** One of the best things to do is to walk through the "city" of London on a weekend - that's the actual square-mile area in the centre of town, rather than the West End, which is Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus, and what most people think of as the city. While Alice was pregnant with Rupert, we walked from Bow, where we lived, into the West End through the city on the weekend with no one around. You get to really appreciate the history of London. We were walking past the Lloyds building, which looks like something out of *Batman*, and then around one corner we could see the original city walls that have been there for hundreds of years, and around the

next a little church called St Andrew Undershaft that was built in 1532 and which managed to escape the Great Fire of London (1666) and the bombing in World War II.

**What about beyond London?**

**AH:** Once we moved out of the city, we got to more easily experience the other great things about the UK - jumping in the car and driving through rolling hills and country lanes past little cottages. It's bizarre to drive through what could be the set of a movie or TV show.

**Was it a culture shock for you and Alice early on?**

**AH:** There's a lot that's similar about the UK and Australia in terms of culture, sense of humour, the joking around with each other. But living in

this part of the world is a very different lifestyle. Space, or lack of it, is one of the biggest things we had to get used to. When we first moved to London, we couldn't believe our first flat was smaller than our bedroom in Melbourne. And it cost about three times as much. The hardest thing to get used to before we got jobs in London, though, was the cost. It's not a cheap city at all, and if you're planning to use it as a base to travel, the sooner you can earn pounds, the better.

**Any overrated tourist attractions?**

**AH:** The most overrated tourist attraction we've been to is the London Eye. London's a city that's much better to see on foot, where you can get up close to it.

**Any off-the-beaten-path places a traveller should visit or experience?**

**AH:** Most guide books on London will mention the Borough Market, but what they don't mention is that at the Borough Market you can get the world's best toasted cheese sandwich. It's just a little market stall that does them, but there is always a queue and it's always worth it.

**What advice would you give a first-time traveller heading to the UK?**

**AH:** A lot of travellers to the UK, especially the ones who set up in London, never get to see much outside the cities. There's a whole lot of the UK to see that's not on fast-train routes, so I'd recommend hiring a car for a few weekends. Try to stick to the back roads and discover a little village pub somewhere. Some of these have been standing in the same spot for hundreds of years. Also, make sure you get out and meet the locals because that's where you'll have the real experiences you will remember forever.

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