

## Old Cities, New Discoveries

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This past summer we had an amazing opportunity to travel to three different continents with our family. Europe was the first stop on our eastward travels. We visited the historic cities of London, Rome, Venice, and Paris. The latter three were particularly interesting because of the beautiful languages spoken by the native people. Everywhere we went, it seemed that there were an endless number of sites to see, museums to visit, and local cuisines to eat. The few days we had in each city felt inadequate, but we tried to make the most of what little time we did have: leaving our hotel early in the morning and returning late at night to sleep, only to wake up the next morning and get back to sightseeing again. After living out of a hotel for two weeks, we were more than happy to stay with relatives in Cairo and Dhaka, our final destinations.

Traveling in these large metropolises, we had many novel experiences, such as relying on the ubiquitous subway systems for transportation and paying for public restroom facilities. That, along with the overpriced McDonalds menus and outrageous gas prices (more than \$8 a gallon in London!), made us realize just how high the cost of living is in large cities. The sheer number of people found in each city milling about on any given street surprised us as well. On the way to our hotel, we were stuck in a traffic jam in Paris at one o'clock in the morning! The streets were alive with lights and people at all hours. The same was true for Dhaka, although it was considerably dimmer since the government recently enforced an early curfew on stores in order to save the energy that lights consume.

These experiences were all a part of big city life, which we as Nashvillians don't experience on a regular basis. Undoubtedly in New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago, one can find the similar hustle and bustle that we did in London, Paris, Rome, Cairo, or Dhaka. What was unique about these was the antiquity of the cities and the structures and buildings found within. Compared to our relatively new American cities, there appeared to be so much history and culture rooted in these foreign cities. London's Westminster Abbey was an impressive church that housed the tombs of dozens of monarchs, poets, and other noted Englishmen. In Paris, we enjoyed the breathtaking architecture and sumptuous designs of the Chateau de Versailles, as well as the Louvre Museum, which was originally a palace in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. In Cairo, we visited one of the original Seven Wonders of the World: the ancient pyramids of Giza (and their neighbors in Saqarra.) From a distance, it was really interesting to see the faint outline of pyramids looming over the busy city center. The ancient structures were juxtaposed with the modern skyline of Cairo. Though we were not allowed inside the campus of Al-Azhar University for security purposes, we were able to glance inside the world's second oldest university (built in the late 900s) from beyond the gates. In Rome, we saw the Colosseum and ruins of the Roman Forum, both dating back thousands of years. We were impressed not only by the famous landmarks, but by the enchanting piazzas and beautiful architecture found throughout the city. Even in Dhaka, where the construction of new shopping malls and apartment buildings seemed to be endless, I discovered there were older parts to the city as well, dating back as far as the 1600's.

Overall, the trip was very fun and enriching. We got to witness how life in America is different from life elsewhere in the world (yet the golden arches of McDonalds were found everywhere!) Every city we went to, we befriended helpful Bengalis, who suggested places to eat or visit or simply made us feel more comfortable in a foreign land. Though we learned a lot from our travels, there is much left to be discovered in those countries. We hope to revisit those places again!