

Harry Potter's a must on London trip with teenager as consultant

By ROSS D. FRANKLIN
Associated Press

LONDON — Every summer, our family vacations somewhere different. We've done theme parks, a classic road trip and the Caribbean. This year, with our son hitting his teens, we went international with 10 days in London. The planning was a team effort: My wife was in charge of the budget and activities schedule. I was in charge of airfare and hotel. Our son played consultant, voting yes or no.

We saved \$1,000 on airfare by taking connecting flights rather than flying direct. Then, using Booking.com, we spent hours researching hotels. The map icon interface was great: Pick a neighborhood, zoom in, click on the hotel. We wanted a Tube station within walking distance, but saved money by picking a one-bedroom with pullout couch over a two-room suite.

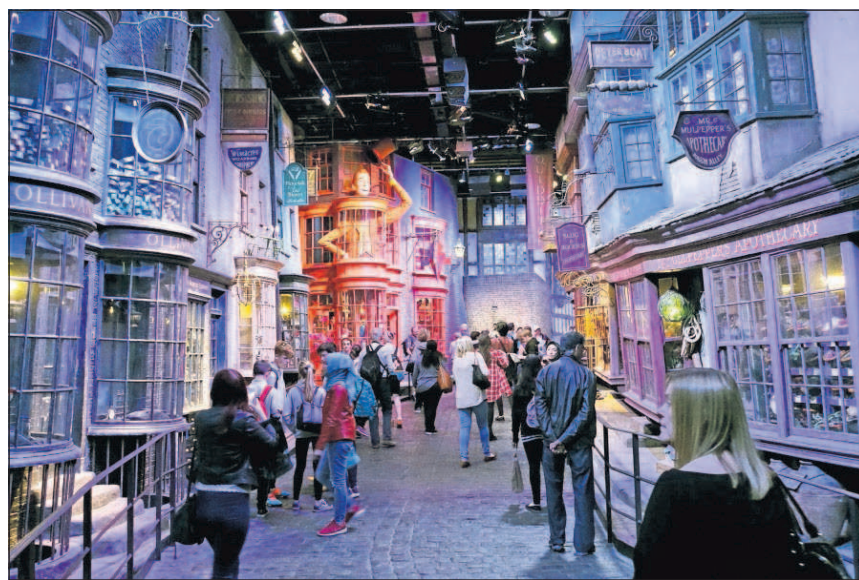
With flights and lodging booked, we moved on to the itinerary. Our son had two must-sees: the Imperial War Museum and Harry Potter studio tour. We bought advance tickets for Potter, two theater shows, a bike tour, the London Eye, several walking tours and a hop-on, hop-off bus. With rain jackets and electric converters packed, we were ready.

So how did it all work out?

Our flights involved a series of unfortunate events, including plane trouble in Chicago, lost luggage on the way home and overhead drop-down screens on our trans-Atlantic leg instead of individual entertainment screens. We had to keep reminding ourselves, "but we saved \$1,000!"

An expensive cab ride from airport to hotel marred our arrival in London. Next time we'll take the train from the airport.

But our hotel, Citadines South Kensington, did not disappoint. The location was ideal, four blocks from the Gloucester Road Tube station, with plenty of restaurants nearby. An Italian eatery, Da Mario, became a favorite. We even knew somebody dining there our first night — the airport cabbie



In this May 23 photo, tourists stroll along the Diagon Alley movie set at The Making of Harry Potter Warner Bros. Studios experience in London.

who'd charged a fortune.

We took the double-decker sightseeing bus on our first morning as a no-stress introduction to the city. Our bus passes included the Tower of London tour and a Thames River cruise. Big Ben, Parliament, 10 Downing Street and Westminster Abbey were a few minutes' walk apart. Cross the river and we were at the London Eye, getting a bird's-eye view of all we'd just seen.

With a teen who grew up reading Harry Potter, the Warner Bros. Studio Tour — The Making of Harry Potter was essential. We saw props, costumes and sets, including Platform 9 ¾, the Night Bus, Harry's cubbyhole at Number 4 Privet Drive and a miniature Hogwarts campus. You can get filmed riding your very own Nimbus 2000, or pile the family into the Weasley invisible car for a group photo. At the massive gift shop you can easily drop a few hundred quid. But skip the butter beer at the food court — oh, it's horrible.

For a real-life adventure, try biking through London. Besides navigating throngs of wandering tourists, we dodged buses, cabs, motorcycles and

delivery lorries while trying not to lose our guide, who biked ahead of the straggling group on our three-hour tour. The only leisurely part was a pedal through St. James's Park, Green Park and Hyde Park.

We hadn't planned a firsthand look at the UK National Health Service, but I added to the bike adventure with an ambulance ride after hitting the pavement head first and suffering a concussion. Our son was enthralled by the history lesson at the Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital on Westminster Bridge: Florence Nightingale set up a nursing school there, and it was bombed by the Germans during World War II. So the emergency room visit was not a total loss.

Fortunately our other travels were mostly by Tube, using the convenient London Underground Oyster Cards. After two days, we delegated figuring out routes and platforms to our son.

We also did several walking tours: one on "Dr. Who" locations; a Jack the Ripper tour at dusk — not for the squeamish — in the modern-day Whitechapel neighborhood; and a Beatles tour with a stop at Abbey Road. Kids who know the Beatles are might like it. If not, be prepared for eye rolls.

Our son calls us the "history geek" family, so we enjoyed our day at the Imperial War Museum. And since no London trip would be complete without a little royal pomp, we watched the "Changing the Guard" ceremony at Buckingham Palace.

We also enjoyed London at night, walking around Piccadilly Circus, Leicester Square and the West End theater district, where we took in "The Audience" and "The Curious Incident of the Dog In the Night-Time."

All in all, we loved our trip. Involving our son in planning and research was key, and can be an effective way to engage teenagers who might otherwise never look up from their screens.

One additional word to the wise: If you go biking in London — or anywhere else — wear a helmet.



In this 2015 photo, a London City Cruises boat tours the River Thames near the Tower Bridge in London.

Potato salad, with a South Indian twist

By MEERA SODHA
Associated Press

Picnicking has long been a tradition for my family, generations ago on the shores of the Arabian Sea, then on the banks of Nile. When they moved to England, they picnicked at seaside at Cleethorpes — still in their saris, stoic in the face of the cold weather, wearing three sweaters each.

Although the landscape and weather changed when they moved here, the food remained the same. The key was always simple food that could travel well and was, most importantly, big on flavor.

It's no surprise, then, that potatoes were always on the menu. They take flavor so well, are inexpensive and can be eaten either hot or cold. Over time these South Indian picnic potatoes, which found their way into my kitchen after a trip to the state of Kerala, India many years ago, have become a family picnic staple.

They are a distant, more tropical cousin of the classic potato salad but embellished with coastal Indian ingredients: crispy shallots, a few spices, crunchy golden cashews and a little coconut milk.

Because they are so rich and flavorful, they are best served with simple accompaniments: Some leftover chicken, chapattis, a tub of lime pickles (available online and in some supermarkets) and a simple salad that won't wilt in the heat.



AP Photo/Meera Sodha

SOUTH INDIAN PICNIC POTATOES

Coconut, shallots and curry leaves are the leading ingredients of South Indian food and together they make a great team. If you can't find any curry leaves, just leave them out.

Start to finish: 25 minutes
Servings: 4 - 6

- 2 pounds baby new potatoes, washed
- 2 tablespoons coconut oil
- 1 teaspoon black mustard seeds (substitute yellow or brown mustard seeds if you can't find black)
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 10 fresh curry leaves
- 5 large shallots, diced
- 1-inch knob of ginger, peeled and grated
- 3 garlic cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 green chilies, finely sliced
- 1 large handful of cashews
- ¾ teaspoon salt (or to taste)
- ½ cup coconut milk

Place the potatoes in a pan of water

and bring to a boil. Simmer for around 10 minutes or until the potatoes are tender. Drain and leave to one side to cool. When cool enough to handle, halve the biggest potatoes.

In a large frying pan, heat the oil over a medium heat and when hot add the mustard seeds, cumin seeds and curry leaves. When the seeds start to wriggle and the curry leaves crisp, add the shallots and cook until they turn golden, then add the garlic, ginger, chilies and cashews.

Cook the mixture for another 2 minutes then add the potatoes and salt. Turn up the heat to high and fry the potatoes for a few minutes until they brown slightly then add the coconut milk and keep stirring until the coconut milk evaporates to a form a sticky glaze.

Can be eaten hot or cold.

Nutrition information per serving:

410 calories; 170 calories from fat;

19g fat (12 g saturated); 0g trans fats;

0 mg cholesterol; 462 mg sodium; 53g

carbohydrate; 7g fiber; 6g sugar; 9g

protein.

Doughnut puffs make a childhood treat extra special

By ELIZABETH KARMEL
Associated Press

When I was growing up, my father would take us to get fresh hot doughnuts from Krispy Kreme every Sunday. The cake doughnuts, covered in peanuts or dipped in sprinkles, were always my favorite. And to this day, I crave cake doughnuts.

Fast forward 20 years to the time when both my sister and I lived in the same New York neighborhood. There was a fantastic bakery nearby where the counters were piled high with zucchini bread, apple walnut muffins, whoopie pies.

As a cook myself, I loved the setup as much as the pastries. It was an open commissary kitchen with a walk-up counter for ordering. As you waited in line, you could watch the bakers make all manner of homespun baked goods. Among the array of deliciousness displayed on the counter was what looked like a mini muffin coated in cinnamon and sugar. The texture of the crumb inside was less dense and more cake than muffin, and it had a cinnamon flavor and a pop of nutmeg. It was called a "puff," or at least that is what my sister and I called it. A puff with a double-shot cappuccino was morning heaven.

My sister moved out the neighborhood years before I too relocated. Because the bakery is no longer close, I decided that I should try to re-create those puffs. A Google search brought up dozens of images for what resembled the mini bites of heaven, but it was amazing how the actual recipes varied greatly and how few delivered.

Finally, I hit upon a recipe with more sugar and more milk making a thinner, more cake-like batter. I increased the cinnamon and nutmeg and added a pinch of lemony cardamom to round out the warm spices — and frankly, just because I love cardamom. The advantage of the sweeter lighter cake is that they will last up to three days in an airtight container. In fact, I think that they are better the next day, making them ideal for a Father's Day breakfast. Make them on Saturday and serve them on Sunday.

These are so good that I often make them for dessert and serve them with a dark chocolate dipping sauce.

Elizabeth Karmel is a barbecue and Southern foods expert. She is the chef and pitmaster at online retailer CarolinaCueToGo.com and author of three books, including "Taming the Flame."



AP Photo/Richard Drew

BAKED DOUGHNUT PUFFS WITH DARK CHOCOLATE DIPPING SAUCE

Start to finish: 45 minutes
Servings: 6

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 ½ cups granulated white sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 generous teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 scant teaspoon ground nutmeg, preferably fresh ground
- Pinch of cardamom
- ½ teaspoon fine-grain sea salt
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 cup whole milk
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla

Topping:

- ½ cup granulated white sugar
 - 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
 - 1/8 teaspoon fine-grain sea salt
- Dark Chocolate Dipping Sauce**
- 6 ounces bittersweet or semi-sweet chocolate (chips or chopped block chocolate)
 - 1/3 cup heavy whipping cream
 - 1 tablespoon Bourbon (or liqueur such as Kahlua, Frangelico, etc.), optional
 - ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
 - 1-2 tablespoons granulated sugar, if desired

Preheat oven to 350 F. Sift the flour, sugar, baking powder, cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamom and salt into a large bowl. In a second bowl, whisk together the eggs, milk, butter and vanilla. Add wet mixture to dry and stir a little at a time until combined.

Spoon the batter into prepared mini muffin tins or regular muffin tins. The easiest way to do this is by transferring the batter (which is fairly thin) to a liquid measuring cup and pouring into tin.

Bake for 16-18 minutes for minis, or until a toothpick inserted in the center of the muffin comes out clean. The tops of the muffins will look dry and slightly nubby.

In a second shallow bowl, mix sugar, cinnamon and sea salt together.

When "puffs" are done, remove from muffin tin after about 2-3 minutes and place on cooling rack. Let cool on the rack for about 1 minute. While the muffins are still warm, swirl them entirely in cinnamon-sugar mixture.

Place muffin back on cooling rack to cool. Eat when cool with or without chocolate dipping sauce, and place any leftovers in an airtight container.

They will keep for 3 days.

For dipping sauce: Make the chocolate sauce up to 2 days in advance. Heat cream to almost boiling, remove from heat and add chocolate. Stir until melted and well combined. Add liquor and vanilla, stirring constantly. If you like it a little sweeter, add sugar, otherwise leave as is. The doughnuts are covered in cinnamon sugar, so I like the chocolate sauce without any added sugar.

Cover with plastic wrap and set aside, or refrigerate.

Nutrition information per serving: 676 calories; 201 calories from fat; 22 g fat (13 g saturated); 0 g trans fats; 109 mg cholesterol; 360 mg sodium; 113 g carbohydrate; 9 g fiber; 77 g sugar; 9 g protein.