

[00:00:35.840] - Intro

Welcome to the UK Travel Planning Podcast. Your host is the founder of The UK Travel Planning website, Tracy Collins. In this podcast, Tracy shares destination guides, travel tips, and itinerary ideas, as well as interviews with a variety of guests who share their knowledge and experience of UK travel to help you plan your perfect UK vacation. Join us as we explore the UK from cosmopolitan cities, to quaint villages, from historic castles to beautiful islands and from the picturesque countryside to seaside towns.

[00:00:36.850] - Karen

Welcome to the UK Travel Planning Podcast. Today we've got a slightly different episode because I'm here today to interview Tracy all about her UK travels at the moment. So, Tracy, can you just tell us a little bit about what you're doing at the moment? You've been in the UK for three weeks.

[00:00:56.070] - Tracy

It is actually just two. I think it would be two weeks. Oh, is it three weeks? You know what? I'm losing track. Is it three weeks? It will be three weeks tomorrow. Oh, my goodness, it's gone so fast. I just want to say thanks, Karen, so much for hosting this episode because this is really good turning the tables because obviously you do the intro and you've been on the podcast a few times, so I've landed this on you. But I know you're going to be brilliant at this. So I've been back for three weeks, arrived on the 11th of April. I've been doing loads of stuff as people in the Facebook group and following us on Instagram will know. I did have a few days rest to spend some time with my family, visited a few National Trust properties, joined the National Trust for the next 12 months for me and Doug, so that's really good. Then after a few days, went off to Lincoln, which I know is your hometown, Karen?

[00:01:46.870] - Karen

It is where I grew up in Lincoln. So yeah, it's really fun having a chat to you today anyway and being on the other side of the seat. And we've done quite a few episodes together lately. We've done ones where we're chatting together and ones where you're interviewing me and ones where I'm interviewing you. So it's fun to catch up and hear all about your UK travels at the moment.

[00:02:07.630] - Tracy

It is. I don't know, it's great to chat and see as well after three weeks away. So obviously, I've been in Lincoln before, but it was lovely to go there and actually met a friend of mine from Australia. So we spent a few days together.

[00:02:20.610] - Karen

Hang on. Your friend from Australia is in Lincoln at the moment. Happened to be in Lincoln.

[00:02:25.720] - Tracy

No, she's actually flown back. She flew back. We met in Lincoln and then we went on to Cambridge and then to London. And then actually, Lucy flew back on the Tuesday and I stayed on in London.

[00:02:39.130] - Karen

We should have just left that really quickly that we both now live in Australia, not in the UK.

[00:02:45.790] - Tracy

Yes. We need to say that, don't we? Yes. Lucy also lives in Australia, but we're all Brits. So in Cambridge, did a walking tour, which was excellent. So I booked that through Get Your Guide. And what was amazing is just me and Lucy on this tour. So we ended up having a private tour of Cambridge, which was fantastic, which also included King's College Chapel, which I say to everybody, if you're going to Cambridge, you have to go to King's College Chapel. It's so beautiful. It really is. We spent a bit of time in the Eagle pub, quite a lot of time in the Eagle pub, which was really good. Certainly Americans can go and then see the airmen signed before they flew off on missions in World War II, they signed the ceiling. It's been a really interesting pub to go to. So that was really good. Oh, and what was really exciting in Cambridge, and though we didn't get asked to be extras, is the film in the next series of The Crown.

[00:03:43.510] - Karen

Wow. I think I saw that in the Facebook group. Lucy shared the details about that. That was so cool.

[00:03:49.130] - Tracy

It was really good. It was fun watching that. They were setting up, though, so we didn't see any stars, I have to say. We then went off to London and we spent a couple of days in London. We went on the London Eye, we spent time in Covent Garden, and then Lucy went off to back to Australia. And then I went and had a photo shoot with Domi, who's from Scalens Studio, who's our preferred partner for photography in London, which was amazing. And Notting Hill, which is such a beautiful, beautiful place to go.

[00:04:21.310] - Karen

And those photos were amazing. You look so cool. It was really, really lovely moment in time captured. I love those pictures.

[00:04:29.410] - Tracy

Honestly, there's just beautiful photos. And I am going to get a couple of them done for their apartment because they are lovely. And it's just a real... You capture that memory in time at that specific moment and I'll always remember it. And we had such a good time. I got on so well. Domi's brilliant as well because I'm not the most confident person at having photos taken of myself. But she's so good at making me feel relaxed.

[00:04:54.530] - Karen

I was just going to say we looked really chilled out and relaxed in them. They look really natural, which I think is really that's the sign of a great photographer is when they can make someone who's not comfortable in front of the camera look like they are relaxed.

[00:05:07.170] - Tracy

Absolutely. One of my favourite photos is just me laughing because it was. That's just encapsulated how I was feeling. It was, and there's other people walking past and they look at you and you're like, I don't care because I'm having a really good time. So then the next day, actually, after a couple of days, the next day I went and met John. So John Copeland from John England Toys. And John took me out on a private data of South East England. Oh, my God, I had the best time. So I need to say, I'm going to say big thanks to John again for taking me out for that date. The weather was amazing. The company was great. John was so interesting to talk to. Great company, as I say. And we went off to... It took me to Ightham Mote, which is part of his medieval day tour.

[00:05:51.020] - Karen

You've learned how to say that. You've learned how to say that since you interviewed him on the podcast a few weeks ago.

[00:05:55.800] - Tracy

Yes, I know I couldn't say it. I can still spell it, but I have to think about it. But oh, my goodness, what an amazing place to visit. Absolutely fantastic. Really brilliant. And then we went on to Hever Castle, which has been on my wish list forever and ever and ever, which also didn't disappoint. And it was great talking to the staff who work there. And they were really interested, really engaging. Obviously, John knows a lot of people. So he introduced me, which was just brilliant. We had such a fun day. I think John had a lot of fun on that day as well. I mean, he's brilliant. He's a brilliant, brilliant tour guide. I couldn't have asked for a better day. I really couldn't. I'm going to say to people, if you want to go out with John, get booking because he is getting booked up and I'd highly recommend it. I said to him yesterday, I'm secretly plotting the next day out where I want to go on the next one.

[00:06:47.970] - Karen

Makes such a difference when you have a knowledgeable guide who you get on with, who can show you around and introduce you to people and give you all of the things that you would never have discovered if you'd gone on your own.

[00:06:59.670] - Tracy

Exactly. You really do. You just learn so much more. You can ask questions. You get that personal attention. I didn't have to drive. John drove. He picked me up and drove me so I could relax and enjoy the scenery down in the Weald of Kent, which it was just fantastic... Obviously, I cannot say how stressed how much I thoroughly enjoyed that day. It was brilliant, absolutely brilliant. And then after that, I had a few days rest because my feet were moving a lot of so I needed a bit of a break. So I came back to my mum's and just put my feet up. And actually, I had to get on with some... I had to record a podcast and I had to do some work. Obviously, there's work to be done behind the scenes and stuff. And I'd big thank you and big shout out as well to Donna and Catherine, who are helping out with the Facebook group as well, because trying to moderate that is quite difficult when you're travelling. And obviously Doug's in Australia at the moment, and he's also working, but he's doing a huge amount as well in the Facebook group. So massive shout out to everybody for supporting me with that, because obviously when you're travelling, it's quite difficult to try and manage those things as well.

[00:08:05.940] - Karen

And it takes a lot more time to manage than you realise when you're not involved in that stuff. It's something you have to be on the go with all the time looking at, don't you?

[00:08:14.970] - Tracy

Yeah, it's like you have to. And I'm obviously talking to people time and I get a lot of emails and I felt a bit bad because the emails were piling up. But I just had to wait until I had a whole morning to sit and actually answer everybody, which I did. But also I'm trying to be really active on social media. So doing a lot more Instagram stories, which I'm enjoying doing. But again, it takes time out to think about what you're putting on. But I really want people to follow along and see what I'm doing and where I'm at and just my day to day experiences. So then this last week I've been down in London. I went down on London. I went down Wednesday morning and I got back Wednesday evening. So I had a full on three days in London. So again, when I came back, I bought myself a foot spa. I spent the entire, I think, about three hours with my feet in the foot spa. But I had a fantastic V&A Museum, Buckingham Palace. I did a Windsor Castle day trip out with walks. I did a few tours with walks, which were brilliant. Went to Windsor Castle, Changing of the Guard, and also the opening ceremony of the Tower of London, which I highly recommend to everybody. It's really good. Had lunch in Fortnum & Mason, which was really nice. And then another visit to Buckingham Palace. I haven't met the King, but I've been a book in a palace a few times now.

[00:09:33.620] - Karen

That's brilliant. And all of this experience helps you give better advice to other people as well. So when people are asking in the group and you're answering questions, you're answering from your personal experience because I've known you for a while now and I know I don't think anyone's as well travelled in the UK as you are because you seem to do everything. You go back regularly. You've done so many tours, you've done so many trips. I think if ever I mention anywhere in the UK, you've been there already. That's an experience.

[00:10:03.370] - Tracy

I think if there's somewhere I haven't been to, Doug's been. Obviously, I know a few people have asked in the group about Doug and Doug is coming over to the UK. He's going to be over in a few weeks' time, and he's here for a month. Doug is going to be spending some time in Wales. He'll be in Wales for about five or six days, I think, altogether. He's going to be spending a bit of time with me in Edinburgh and in York and then down in London. Then I think we're hoping to get a day down and Brighton together. So it's just trying to fit as much as we can in. But yes, Doug will be here and he will be reporting. And I'm actually going to be talking to him. I interview him for a podcast all about his trip to Wales because obviously there's so much to see, we can't always travel together and fit everything in. So this trip, I'm spending a lot more time in London. So in June, I'll be back in London for 10 days and I'm doing a lot. I'm doing some food tours again with walks. I'm going to be doing a lot more different tours. I'm also doing a Ted Lasso tour, which I cannot wait for. I love you, Ted Lasso.

[00:11:06.890] - Karen

I know that's one of your favourites.

[00:11:09.670] - Tracy

Yeah, absolutely adore that series. So I'm so looking forward to that. I'm going to be staying down in Putney, so not too far from Richmond anyway. So getting ahead of plans that are coming up. But yes, I know a few people asked about Doug, so yes, Doug is coming.

[00:11:25.360] - Karen

You haven't left him. Well, you've left him behind for a little while, but not for too long.

[00:11:29.040] - Tracy

For a short time. But it's also been, to be honest, it's actually been really good for me to do a bit of solo travel. Female solo travel is, I think, something that when we get out there and do that, I used to do a lot in my 20s and I've done a little bit in my 30s, but more often than not, I'd be travelling with my daughter or with Doug. So it's actually been quite interesting and quite good to get out my comfort zone again and do that solo travel. The only time I felt slightly uncomfortable, I have to say, was when I was it's sometimes eating in the posher restaurants, you feel a little bit more self conscious when you're on your own. And I probably need to have strategies for that. Maybe have a book. I mean, I've got my phone, but you feel a bit self conscious on your phone the whole time. But otherwise, it's been actually absolutely fine.

[00:12:16.700] - Karen

That's good. I was just going to say, in terms of travelling around, I know, like you, I used to in my 20s all the time travel around the UK on trains and all hours on my own. But how are you getting around now? Are you mainly using trains? Are you hiring cars? Are you using taxis? How are you getting about?

[00:12:36.850] - Tracy

We're trying actually to avoid hiring a car this trip. I think Doug and I might have a car for a few, maybe for a week in June, but we're not totally sure. But actually, we're trying to get around mainly by train, by public transport. I will just interject at this point to say that there are unfortunately going to be some more train strikes coming up, but dates have been announced in May, which is when this podcast will come out. Obviously, everybody else work around that because we have our plans as well for July, so obviously waiting to find out. We just hope it can get sorted because it's been a long time now, 12 months. But yes, it's something we'll have to take into consideration that may impact plans in May and June and into July if things don't get sorted. But yes, I have been using the trains. Trains are excellent way to get around the UK really fast. Been getting between London and the Midlands where my mum lives. In London, I've been using an oyster card. Again, it's such a controversial one when I talk about this because some people are so pro using contactless and pro using oyster card. I just said everybody, use whatever suits you. I happen to like an oyster card, that's what I use. So I've used that. You can obviously use contactless if you want. I've used a bus in London, jumped on the bus to get from the Tower of London to St. Paul's on Friday. And I've also taken a black cab to get from Fortnum and Mason and Buckingham Palace because I realised I came out of Fortnum and Mason and I realised I had 10 minutes to get myself to Buckingham Palace. So I was like, whoops, right? So I walked up to the Ritz bus and then got into a cab that was outside there. So that was really good. It was not too expensive and it was the easiest way and also easy on my feet because I've been walking around a lot. So using all sorts of different ways to get around.

[00:14:26.840] - Karen

Can I just ask around oyster cards? Because when we were in London last year, we just used contactless payments and our debit cards and just to get around, we didn't bother with an oyster card. But does it expire? So if you have one now and you keep it and you come back again next year, can you just top it back up again and use it next year?

[00:14:47.520] - Tracy

Yeah, you can. Absolutely. I mean, I've had my oyster card quite a few years now, and I guess that's it. I'm just attached to it. So I just top it up and just use it. So yes, you can. In fact, it doesn't even have to

be me who uses it. If somebody else was visiting and they wanted to use my Oyster card, they could. It's not a problem, really. So I just top it up. I guess that's the advantage with contactless is you don't have to think about topping it up because it's coming out your account. And I could use both. It's just that I'm so used to having it. I've got my photo ID and my Oyster card in the little wallet and then I just keep it in my pocket. But it's also because I just need to know where my stuff is. I don't want to get my phone out. I don't want to get my credit card out. There's enough to think about for me anyway. So that's why I just prefer. I could use my watch. I've got an Apple watch. I just find it easier for me. But obviously, again, it's one of those things, whatever suits you, whatever works for you is the easiest way to do it. Just read up about it and make a decision. I think that's the thing. But yeah, I've had an oyster card for I don't know how many years now, quite a long time.

[00:15:56.760] - Karen

We'll pop a link below because I know you've got some good articles on your site as well about oyster cards and whether it's the right thing for you so you can get the pros and cons of it as well. Now, in terms of accommodation, I know you've been staying with your mum here and there in the Midlands. What other accommodation have you been staying in? Hotels, B&Bs, Airbnb?

[00:16:16.290] - Tracy

No, I've mainly been staying in hotel guest houses because London is so expensive. I wanted to try out a few different hotels. So at the moment, I've been on the mid range and budget in London. I stayed in the Zed Hotel in Holborn this week, which is the more budget, towards more budget side of things, and it was excellent. Absolutely excellent. It was not the hugest room, but perfect for what I needed. Absolutely perfect. And I will put some photos of that in the show notes. And then when I was with Lucy, we stayed in the Park Plaza County Hall, which is near Waterloo, which is again, excellent location. For me, the most important thing is location. So obviously near Holborn is near Covent Garden, Seven Dials. So that's great for theatre, restaurants, lots around there, really good tube links. And then the Park Plaza County Hall is next door to Waterloo. So you've got the London Eye, Westminster, very close. So that was more towards mid range, upper mid range. And that was really nice as well. So that included breakfast, which was really nice. But the Zed Hotel, you'd have to pay extra. But there was a Sainsbury's opposite. So I just would go and grab something in the morning. And there's plenty of cafes to pick up a coffee or a chai latte if you're me. And then in Lincoln in Cambridge, we basically just stayed at B&B's, I can't remember actually, hotels next to the train station in Cambridge, which is important because we're traveling by train, we didn't want to be... Lucy had all her luggage with her because she was going back to Australia. So we need to be really conscious of that. And then Lincoln, we stayed right beside the Cathedral in the Castle, which was perfect. Absolutely perfect.

[00:17:56.170] - Karen

Because obviously Lincoln train station is quite a long way from the Castle and Cathedral. And there's a very steep hill in between the two. So if you're going to be staying in Lincoln, unless you really want to do the... I think everyone should do the walk up the hill if they can at one point during the trip to Lincoln. But yeah, so you stayed around the Cathedral?

[00:18:17.140] - Tracy

Yes, I got a cab. Yes, I got a cab. There's no way I would have walked up there back. And actually, I will just mention that because about the luggage situation, because obviously, she had all her she had a big suitcase and a medium suitcase. And that was more of an issue when we got into London, actually getting from London, Liverpool Street over to Waterloo, because a few of the lifts weren't working. So that was quite intimidating. I know Lucy was a bit... I had to help her a couple of times. And in fact, once I left and got on the escalator down, and I just heard, Tracy. Because this was trying to manage these two massive suitcases with escalators, which, of course, you shouldn't really do. But if the lifts aren't working... So there was a few occasions where she struggled a bit. So when she left, I actually helped take one of the suitcases because I didn't have any luggage at that point. But that is something that you've got to consider if you're travelling. Try and if you can, travel as light as possible because you really do not want to be wheeling two or three massive suitcases around. It's not a lot of fun, especially on the London underground. We did the tube and we did the tube and we did the experience. But it's easier, I guess, from Heathrow because you can jump on the Piccadilly line or get

onto the Elizabeth line. But we were crossing from Liverpool Street, so I had to do a couple of changes. Maybe a cab would have been better in hindsight because it was quite stressful, I think, for both of us, really. I know Lucy was struggling with the suitcases a bit. But yeah, so accommodation in London, we get asked about all the time. The main thing for me with accommodation, yes, is price because it is expensive. I as a solo female traveller, this time I've stayed in hotels in London. I did look at an apartment in Notting Hill, which I like the idea of. And I thought, you know what? No, I actually prefer the idea of just in a hotel. It just felt safer for me. So I made that decision. So I'd like to stay in one of the luxury hotels next time. So if any of the luxury hotel brands are listening to this podcast, please feel free to reach out.

[00:20:24.900] - Karen
They can sponsor your next time.

[00:20:27.120] - Tracy
Absolutely. I'm happy to stay at any of the five star accommodation on offer in London. Thank you.

[00:20:34.040] - Karen
That sounds nice. Can I come with you on that one?

[00:20:37.560] - Tracy
Yeah, absolutely.

[00:20:39.000] - Karen
What have been the highlights so far? I know you've had probably so many and you've only been there for three weeks, but what are the highlights so far?

[00:20:48.780] - Tracy
So much, I suppose, really. I have to say I thoroughly enjoyed the day out with Jon. That was an absolute highlight to be able to. I cannot stress how amazing it is having your own tour guide. It is fantastic. It really is. So I think that definitely is up there as one of the main highlights of the trip so far. I loved my photo shoot with Domi of Scalens Studio because she's just so lovely. And the photos, I don't think I'm particularly photogenic, but she does an amazing job because they're lovely photos. Even I'm saying that, which sounds a bit vain, but anyway. But they are lovely.

[00:21:28.160] - Karen
They are. They're really lovely pictures. You can see your joy from being there in the location. It's really lovely to see.

[00:21:36.070] - Tracy
Yeah, it's perfect location. I know Domi wants to take some more, so hopefully I'll have some more with maybe dresses on because I was having to dress warmly because it was a bit chillier that day in Notting Hill. But hopefully have some nice dresses on and take some pictures in Westminster next time with Domi. So that was amazing. She's always a joy to spend time with as well. She's an amazing woman and incredibly inspirational. And then just the tours, I've had some wonderful tours with Walks as well who've invited me along on to some of their tours. And again, small group tours, brilliant, all organised. Again, you learn so much more. I haven't got the time to do... I'd love to be able to know everything, but I can't. There's just too much to know about the history and about everything about everywhere in the UK. I can't know absolutely everything. So it's wonderful you go on a tour with somebody who knows that area or that attraction or that castle or that house or changing the guard they know all the intimate details and all the things that you may not know, they know so they can give you amazing tips and you learn things from them. So that's been absolutely fantastic. I will also say something that really personal that I was really wanting to do is that I've been to Windsor Castle quite a few times and I did a walks tour on Thursday with them, which was amazing. Brilliant transport from London. And we had a fantastic guide. So shout out to Julia. But also it was just so lovely to go and see where the Queen's been laid to rest. Just to pay my respects, I just felt that was... Yeah, it was something important and very personal, I think, that I just wanted to do. So that actually meant quite a lot to be able to do that. So yeah, it was lovely, I have to say it was really lovely. And there was a lot of

people obviously queuing up to do that, though I think it was quite quiet saying that in a Windsor on Thursday. Then I've also been able to spend as much time as I want in the V&A Museum, because Doug isn't with me to say enough, because I love it. I honestly could go every day and there's so much to see there. It's a beautiful museum. It's such an interesting museum. There's so many. It really is fabulous. I can't stress people enough. Go and visit the V&A.

[00:23:51.480] - Karen

That's the thing with museums in London is they're enormous and you can spend many days in almost any of them. We love the Natural History Museum and could just go back again and again and again.

[00:24:03.620] - Tracy

I've been there so many times. And I had planned to go from the V&A to the Natural History Museum, but I just couldn't drag myself out of the V&A. I just couldn't. I was up to say, you know what? I could spend hours in the Cast Courts alone. And if you don't know what the Cast Courts are, you'll have to look up in the show notes and have the link. But honestly, I just find them fascinating. It's a fantastic museum. I really enjoyed it.

[00:24:30.490] - Karen

And it wasn't just because you were too cold because I think you mentioned that on Facebook that it was cold and you were trying to decide where to go.

[00:24:36.880] - Tracy

Well, it was really interesting that... Because that was Wednesday, wasn't it? Actually? Yeah. And I had the changing of the guard in the morning and that finished about quarter past 11, half past 11. And I was like, Well, I've got the whole rest of the day. But it was freezing. And my intention, I had two choices. One was to go to Hampton Court Palace because there was a Tulip Festival on and I really wanted to go and see the Tulips. And the other was the V&A. So two favourite things that I wanted to do. And it was cold. So the V&A won over. But it was a fantastic place to spend a day when it's not particularly very warm or when it's raining in London. And just spend the time in the cafe because it's so pretty. It was lovely as well. Another highlight was actually the Cambridge tour that I did. We had Sonia, who was our guide there, who was also fantastic. So shout out to Sonia, who I book through, Get Your Guide. Fantastic walking tour. We were just very lucky that there was just me and Lucy on that tour that day. Very knowledgeable, took us around Cambridge. I did a tour last year as well, but I still learned more this year. There's always stuff to learn. And another highlight, just the last one I guess I'll bring up, was a Buckingham Palace. Now, I got an email from, I think Royal Palaces in February, say that they had some slots for the small group tours in April. I did balk a bit at the price because it was £90. So I was a bit like, oh. But you know what? It was worth every penny. Fantastic. It was so lovely. And I was back at Buckingham Palace on Friday to do a tour of the mews. And I actually bumped into the tour guide that took us. And I was just telling her it was fantastic. You can't take any photos. That's the only thing that I but I understand. But it was just amazing to see these places, seeing the Queen wandering around that. And you know what I mean? You're just seeing people in these places all the time, the Royal family, and you're like, Oh, my goodness. I'm standing in this particular spot. So that was really interesting.

[00:26:36.520] - Karen

And also you've become a bit of a celebrity because people keep spotting you while you're around and about.

[00:26:42.430] - Tracy

Yeah, it has been lovely. It's been so nice to have a few people from the group who spotted me in London have come up and said hello. So that it's been so big hi to Berna and Jocelyn and Robbie, who I had arranged to meet up with. But yeah, it's so lovely. And I keep saying to people, if you see me around anywhere in the UK or Doug, if you see either of us around in the UK, I guess London will probably be the typical place that you potentially will spot us, is come and say hello. Come and say, we love it. It's just so nice to find out where you're from, what you're doing, how you're enjoying your trip, and just to meet you, really. So yes, please come and say hello and have a selfie.

[00:27:25.810] - Karen
It has to be done. It's the law.

[00:27:29.560] - Tracy
Yeah, it's really good fun.

[00:27:31.050] - Karen
Cool. And I know that we've had a podcast together chatting about our favourite British foods. How are you getting on with all the food at the moment on this trip? Is there any favourites? Have you been eating one particular meal? What have you been doing with the food?

[00:27:45.780] - Tracy
Well, I'm trying to be a little bit careful because I think if I eat any more Marks & Spencers cherry cake, which I think is my ultimate favourite, I don't think my jeans will fit, even with all the walking I'm doing. So I'm trying to hold back on that. But yes, Marks & Spencers cherry cake is my absolute favourite when it comes to a cup of tea. But I've been having some beautiful roast dinners. Big shout out to my friend Linda, who I went to stay with for a couple of days, who did a fantastic Sunday roast, which Doug's very jealous of. But he'll be able to come visit and have his own Sunday roast soon. And then my mum has been absolutely spoiling me with my two favourite meals, which are Gammon Steak.

[00:28:26.810] - Karen
Scampi and gammon, I'm sure.

[00:28:28.280] - Tracy
Scampi and Gammon, yes. I love both of those. Honestly, I literally could eat them alternate days for the rest of my life and not get sick. I just love them. I've had a great time just wandering around Marks & Spencers. I've been taking lots of photographs of the different foods and stuff that you can get in lots of the different shops, but particularly Marks & Spencers, because I guess that's my favourite. I've been sampling some of the meal deals. I have to shout out for Marks & Spencers. They're brand new, I think it's like the best ever, whatever, Prawn Sandwich. Oh, my goodness, it is delicious. Seriously delicious. I've had quite a number of those now as well because the meal deals are brilliant. So if you want to know about meal deals and how they can help your budget when you're over here, you can listen to that earlier podcast where we talk about British food. But also we'll put the links in the show notes, won't we, Karen? Yes, we will.

[00:29:30.690] - Karen
And I really miss the Marks & Spencers evening dinner meal deals that you could get for two. So especially when we had young kids, it was really handy to have a nice gourmet dinner for two that you could just pop in the oven and have with a bottle of wine. And that was really lovely.

[00:29:48.960] - Tracy
That's really good. I can hear your little dog barking in the background.

[00:29:52.340] - Karen
Sorry, I've just come back from a dog walk.

[00:29:55.710] - Tracy
It's very cute. Nobody's going to mind. Everybody's going to love him. Little dog. What's he called again?

[00:30:02.380] - Karen
Lorenzo.

[00:30:03.890] - Tracy
Lorenzo. A little Chihuahua, isn't he? A little chihuahua, but he's got a very big bark.

[00:30:08.230] - Tracy

Yeah, well, that's typical. I used to have a dachshund, a little dog, big attitude I would say. The meal deals have been excellent. There's just so much on offer. And I've also taken photos of the dinner options as well that you can get. They're just good value. And if you're staying in a VRBO or you're staying in an Airbnb, they're an excellent option for the evening. If you can just go and buy yourself. I think I can't remember us getting started in a main course in a dessert for like I'm guessing I can't remember the price, like 12 quid or something like that, £12.

[00:30:39.790] - Karen

So when it comes to packing, how did you get on with your packing? I know that you were saying that when you were trying to get all your cases ready, you were a little bit overweight with your cases, and that was quite a stressful experience. Was there anything that you haven't brought with you that you wish you had, or anything that you brought with you that you thought you shouldn't have brought? How's the whole experience of packing for the UK?

[00:31:01.300] - Tracy

Well, it was a bit of a nightmare because obviously coming over for 12 weeks, you tend to want to pack a little bit more. And also because I'm spending time in Greece, where it's going to be warmer, so I needed some summer clothes. So I had overpacked and at the airport, I'd overpacked my hand luggage by a few KGs, and I was made to unpack that and try and fit that in my suitcase. But obviously, my suitcase was fully packed, so thank goodness Doug was with me. He just had to take some things home, so he'll bring them over with him. But unfortunately, the presents got kicked out of the suitcase. So I've not arrived with any presents. So in terms of what I didn't bring, I think gloves have been the one thing that I was saying to Doug. I should have brought some gloves. So he's like, Pop to Primark and buy yourself some. But I'm hoping it's warmed up now. So that was the only thing I guess was that was more... I guess I brought plenty of scarves, so I've used those. It has been a little bit colder than I expected, to be honest, and they have had some quite chilly weather, though. Hopefully, it warmed up now, but then it's going to get colder again at the end of the week. So probably, I guess the thing for me is I have a lot of tech. So I've got my laptop, I've got my iPad, I've got video stuff which weighs quite a bit. So I couldn't kick that out of my suitcase. But yeah, it was very stressful. It's the first time I've ever had to take everything out and repack it in front of everybody. So there wasn't it was actually a really unpleasant way to start a flight actually. And I got really hot and bothered about it all. But otherwise, since I've been here, I did buy myself a brand new small carry on, which is a really good size. But obviously I'd still over packed it because I think I was about 4KGs over and they were being very strict on the flight, which is fair enough. I was over. But yeah, otherwise I've been fine. I mean, I've been looking because obviously I can stay with my mum so I can get washing done. So that's fine. But there are some really good shops in the UK to go shopping.

[00:33:05.740] - Karen

I'm sure Doug's case will come home full of Marmite later on.

[00:33:10.710] - Tracy

Oh, yes, it will. Absolutely. I must admit, I've so far bought myself, I think, one pair of crop trousers from Marks & Spencers, a green pair that are really pretty. But I'm trying to avoid buying too much when I'm here because I know last time I ended up having to send an extra suitcase at \$700 back. But it's hard in travel for 12 weeks. When you're doing two or three weeks, I can manage with carry on with the best of them. And I would go into Greece with carry on. But when you've got 12 weeks, it's a lot harder to actually... And especially when it's crossing over seasons.

[00:33:44.190] - Karen

Yes. We should just say that you're hopping over to Greece for a little bit for a travel conference, a travel blogging conference in between your trip, aren't you?

[00:33:53.510] - Tracy

I am, yes. I'll just be away for two weeks. So I'm going away this Friday, the fifth. So actually this will be after the podcast comes up because the podcast or before the podcast comes out, so it'll come out on the ninth. So I'm away from the fifth to the 19th in Greece for that, which I'm really looking

forward to. But I will be back in the UK on the 19th. Unfortunately, missing the coronation, I did ask the King, but he wouldn't change it. Well, I didn't ask the King, really, but you know what I mean? I thought about asking the King, but I knew he wouldn't change it. So unfortunately, I'm going to miss it. But obviously, I've been in London for the last on and off the last couple of weeks, and it's extremely busy. There has been an impact, obviously, because of the preparations for the coronation. So around Buckingham Palace at the moment, it's pretty much chaos with a setting up, I don't know what you want to call the seating arrangements and obviously barriers. Places are shut that you can't get into to see because of preparations. I think Westminster Abbey is now shut. Tower of London, the Crown Jewels, I went in on Friday. Majority of the Crown Jewels have all been moved from there now. Even at Windsor on... I don't know if this had anything to do with the coronation, but it was a Windsor on Thursday, and 15 minutes before the change of the guard was due to take place, it was cancelled because they're all practising throughout the night. They're doing a lot of practices throughout the evening and throughout the night when it's quiet. Oh, and I just have to tell you this, because this is a couple of really interesting things. So I was in Buckingham Palace and I can't remember the name of the room and I should. They've actually got a mock up of Westminster Abbey where the King and Queen are practicing the ceremony, which I thought was really interesting because obviously, you don't want to get it wrong, do you? I mean, you're going to be in front of how many billions of people, I guess. So yes, apparently they're practicing that at the moment. And also, yes, I went to see the Royal carriages in the Royal Mews on Friday. So that was really interesting just talking to people there about the preparations that they're making for the Golden State Carriage, which is a bit over the top, I have to say, because it's gold, and the Jubilee Carriage. But it was fascinating to see those. So I'll put some photos in the show notes again there. But yes, everybody, all the people who are involved, there's so much going on, so much behind the scenes of getting all the things prepared, whether it's changing. Apparently, the Crown has obviously got to be resized. The new Crown for Queen Camilla, that's being changed. I think she's having Queen Mary's Crown. I hope I got that right. So there's all those things to take place. And then just like the ceremony, who's involved in it and practicing it. And then obviously preparing all of the buildings for all the people that are going to be there because it's going to be lots of people from around the world. What was really nice is the bunting has gone up. So the Union Jacks have gone up again on Regent Street, Bond Street. So that's lovely to see. But it's chaos. I left Buckingham Palace on Friday and I was planning to walk through Green Park to get the tube station and the way that I was going to go the quickest has all shut off now. So I don't know if that's because they've got stuff set up for the different news people from around the world. So I had to go the long way around, which my feet did not thank me for. But it is a real excitement. There's a real sense of excitement. There's so much on the shops, all decorated. There's a lot of memorabilia, lots of things, beautiful memorabilia that's come out to celebrate the coronation. So yeah, it'll be exciting, but it will be very busy in London.

[00:37:41.890] - Karen

Yes, it reminds me of when we were there last year, the Queen passed away on the day we just landed in the UK. And then a few days later, we went to London and there was so many changes. The roads were blocked off in all kinds of places. And you just got to be prepared for a lot of changes. So we went to Harry Potter Studios and came back on the bus and the bus couldn't get to Victoria because all the roads were blocked off. So we had to get dropped off somewhere else. And then we had to try to navigate, which tube stations had been closed off as well. So not all the tube stations were open. So we had to figure out a way to get across London with all of these changes. And we did a hop on hop off bus tour as well. And some of the roads for that were closed, so they had to take detours. And so I think it's just, if you're visiting at the moment, just be prepared that there will be a lot of changes going on.

[00:38:33.990] - Tracy

Absolutely. You just can't. Hopefully, obviously, after the coronation, it will settle down. But there's such a lot going on because this is a huge event. It's the first time in 70 years that we've had a coronation. So yeah, 70 years. So it's going to be just a lot. A lot of people are doing a lot of work. There's a lot of preparation to make sure that it's perfect, basically, which I'm sure it will be. But yes, I'm a bit sad that I'm not here when it's on. I was trying desperately to stay in the country, but as I say, unfortunately, I've got to get myself over to Athens.

[00:39:07.400] - Karen

It's probably better to watch it on a screen somewhere anyway, because it'll fun wherever you watch it, I think.

[00:39:13.640] - Tracy

Yeah, absolutely. That's true.

[00:39:16.830] - Karen

In terms of how much money you've been spending while you've been around, have you been taking cash with you? Have you been paying mostly by card? I know you have a cash challenge that you've been doing where you've taken out a certain amount of cash that you're trying to see how long it lasts you. How have you been getting on with that?

[00:39:33.420] - Tracy

Yeah, well, I decided to do this because this is another... There's some emotive topics that come up in the Facebook group where you want to jump in because people have very strong opinions. It's a bit like the Oyster card versus contactless thing. People have very strong opinions and that's it. Same when it comes to cash or contactless. No, you don't need any cash whatsoever. You can only just use contactless. So I actually wanted to do the cash challenge. So I took out £60 when I first arrived to see exactly how much, if anything, I would need. And so far, I've had to use it three times. And the last time I have to say was the 18th of April. So I haven't had to use it for a couple of or twelve days, whatever. But that first week, I ended up paying cash to the taxi driver in Lincoln because the machine didn't work. So I needed to use it. So I used Apple Pay. It's on my phone. I don't carry my cards around. I use that. So I had to use cash then. I used it to tip the guide in Cambridge. I gave her a tip. Obviously, any other tips for guides that I'm keeping it for. And then I was the last time, I'm trying to think where the last thing... Oh, yes, Covent Garden. I wanted to buy a scarf for the photo shoot with Union Jacks on. So I got my eye on a scarf at Covent Garden and it was £6 and I had to pay cash. There was no other option. So I guess those are three times that I've used it. Obviously, bearing in mind, if you want to give tips that restaurants already added 12%, most restaurants are added charge on. In London, I've noticed that 12.5 %, so I haven't been leaving tips, but if you want to leave a tip, obviously you're going to need to have cash and obviously pounds. So I've got £36.50 left. So you need to have some cash. That's something that Doug and I will say. And that's been in Lincoln, Cambridge, and London. So three occasions I've had to use that cash. So have some cash on you, have £50 on you. It's not a huge amount of money, but at least you've got some. But again, I get a lot of people on the Facebook, No, you don't have any cash at all. Well, I beg to differ. And also really interesting as well, Sally Anne, who's been on the podcast a few times, who's got her private to a company in Far North Scotland, she also says the point, and she's absolutely right. We said, you can go to some of these places and the cash thing doesn't work, so the machine's down. So how are you going to pay? So you really need to think about that thing and just have the provision to have some cash with you.

[00:42:19.190] - Karen

Yeah, it's always a good idea to have some in your pocket just in case you need it. Are you going to be going back to London again now or before the coronation or is this it now? Have you been and done your London things?

[00:42:31.280] - Tracy

No, I'm actually back in London on Wednesday. I've been invited to an event by Merlin at Madam Tussauds on Wednesday night. So I'll be going there Wednesday. I may go Wednesday afternoon. I may go into the British Museum if I feel we'll see where I'm at because... Not the British Museum, sorry, the British Library, but we'll see. Otherwise, I'll just go to Madam Tussauds on Wednesday night. But I'm planning to not go into London apart from that. And that's quite easy because I get into Marylebone Station and Madam Tussauds is very close there. So I don't actually have to go further into London. So that's the plans, really, until I'm not going to be back in London until June. But I've got 10 days in London in June and I'm going to be doing lots of tours, visiting lots of places. I will be spending a day in Greenwich. I will be going down the Camden Court. I'm going to be spending some time going round the markets. I was at Portobello Market a couple of weeks ago, but I'll be going to

Camden Market. Lots of places that I want to explore a bit more of. I'm going to do a food tour of Borough Market. I'm doing a historic pubs tour as well. They're with Walks, so I'm really excited to do those. But in between that time from when I get back from Greece, I'm looking at spending some time in Oxford. I'll also be meeting Victoria from Cotswold Teacup Tours. I'll be meeting her in the Cotswold, so I'm really looking forward to seeing Victoria. I'm trying to think what else I've got, I'll be in Edinburgh for a short time. I'll be in Northumberland, so I'll be seeing Mark from Northumberland. It'd be lovely to see Mark. Then I'll be down in York and I'll be meeting up with Sinead, who's in podcast episode 3 all about visiting York. So I'll be seeing Sinead there, spending, I think, three days in York. And then hopefully Brighton and then some more time with Doug in London before I then head off to Paris. I'm going to Paris as well for a day trip. I'm hoping to do two at the moment. I've booked the luxury one, the champagne tour to Paris for the day. So I'll be doing that. And that's actually on the day of the trooping of the colour so Doug will be in London to report on that. So if you want to know about the trooping of the colour, you have to check out the show notes. But that's another main event in the Royal calendar. A lot of pomp and ceremony that day.

[00:44:50.940] - Karen

Wow. So you've got a lot left to cram in. So when is it you're going to be leaving the UK to come back to Australia?

[00:44:57.160] - Tracy

Not until the first week in July. I'm actually going to be in Bath for a few days because it's my mum's 80th birthday this year. Yeah. So I've treated her to a very nice hotel in Bath for three days. So I'll be there first few days in July and then fly back. It's my daughter's graduation for her PhD, so I'll be back to see her become Dr. McConnachie. So that's going to be a lot of fun. So not until I think about the seventh of July, something like that, I'm back.

[00:45:31.360] - Karen

Wow. So you've got loads left to cram in and loads of fun left to experience. And I'm sure we'll be doing another recap, or you'll be doing another recap later on to tell us about the rest of your trip. But I think that's really covered all of the things we wanted to chat about to look at your first two or three weeks in the UK. So that wraps up Episode 45. So you'll find the show notes today at uktravelplanning.com/episode-45. And thank you today, Tracy, for telling us all about your travels.

[00:46:01.920] - Tracy

Well, thanks so much to Karen for coming on and agreeing to interview me. I've turned the tables on her today because normally I'm the one that does it. So I hope you had a lot of fun doing this, Karen. And I just wanted to say to everybody as well, say thanks so much to Karen is thanks everybody for listening. Hope you enjoy the episode. I will be doing some more updates and I have got some trip reports with some people who are actually in the UK at the moment traveling around. So hopefully I'll get those recorded and out in June. But for this week, that just leaves me to say, happy UK travel planning.